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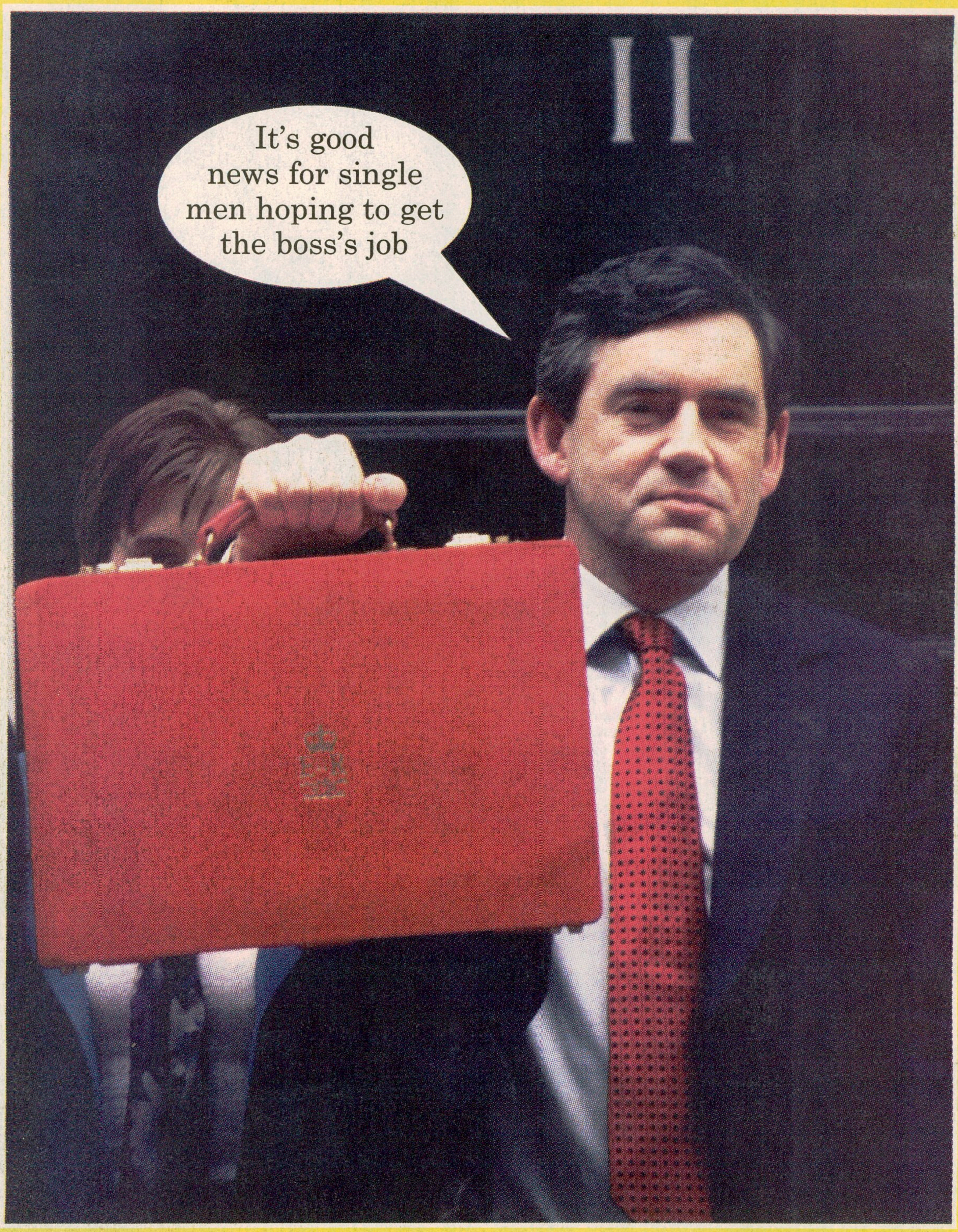

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Gnome

I AM delighted that my venture capital operation, Algnomy of Lombard Street, has been called in by the government to rescue the ayling firm of Rover cars.

Some ill-informed critics (ie, everyone) have foolishly alleged that Algnomy is merely an asset-stripping operation with no interest in the long-term prospects of the British Manufacturing Industry.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We see a great future for Rover in Britain, provided certain elementary conditions are met, viz:

1. Company to be broken up.

2. Profitable sections to be sold off.

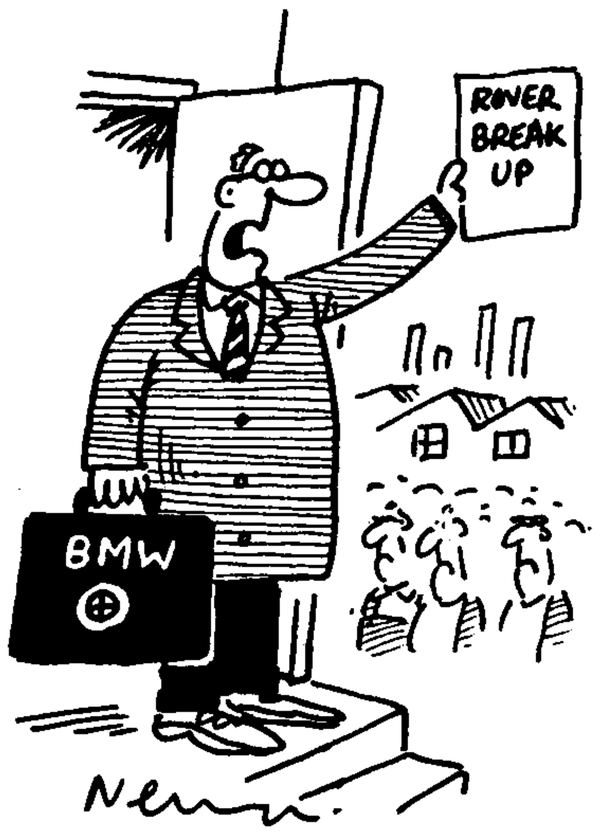
3. Rest to be closed.

4. Entire workforce to be sacked.

5. Company to be renamed Gnome.com with zero staff and market capitalisation of 800 billion pounds.

6. Life peerage for myself when this plan goes spectacularly wrong.

E.Strobes@Gnome.con



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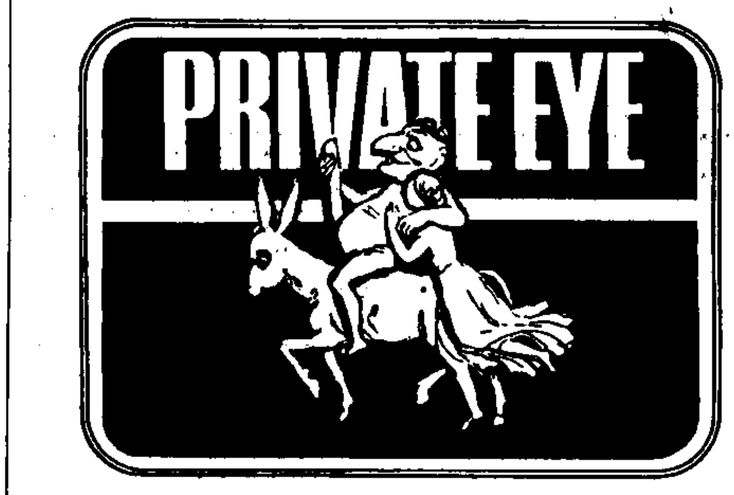
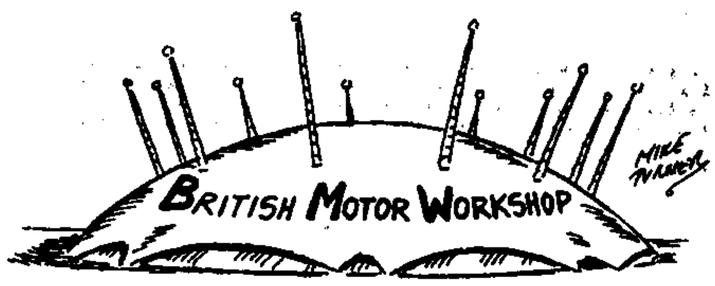


101 Uses For A Dome



Retraining Centre

Curse Of Blair

SO farewell then, Bob Ayling of British Airways. His sacking may have come as a surprise to BA's press office, which described an *Observer* story about his imminent demise as "a lie" only five days before he was duly given the boot. But to everyone else it had been wholly predictable ever since Ayling "came out" as a "new" Labour crony three years ago – holding a joint birthday party with Jack Straw, chairing the New Millennium Experience Company, etc. The Curse of Blair, which afflicts business tycoons who succumb to New Labour's wooing, has struck again. Here are some of the other victims:

GEOFFREY ROBINSON treated the Blairs to holidays at his houses in Italy and France, and was rewarded with the job of paymaster-general in May 1997. Here, surely, was conclusive proof that "successful businessmen" had nothing to fear from Labour. Alas! Robinson's company TransTec has since collapsed and is now being investigated by the DTI.

SIR COLIN SOUTHGATE, head of the music group EMI, was appointed chairman of the Royal Opera House by Chris Smith last year. EMI's share price fell by more than 40 percent over the next four months, and the company admitted that its trading position was "terrible".

MARTIN TAYLOR, chief executive of Barclays, was brought into Whitehall in 1997 to advise on reforming the tax and benefit system. His bank immediately suffered a succession of disasters, including a £300m loss on an American hedge fund, £350m losses on dud Russian investments and a £500m drop in profits. By 1998 Barclays shares had fallen by a third under his stewardship. He was then ousted, since when the share price has recovered.

LORD HOLLICK was recruited to advise the department of trade and industry on competition policy after the general election. The following year shares in his United News and Media were marked down from 940p to 560p in one four-month period, wiping nearly £2bn off the company's market value.

GERRY ROBINSON, chairman of Granada, appeared in a Labour election broadcast in 1997 and was chosen by Chris Smith to succeed Lord Gowrie as chairman of the Arts Council a few months later. Granada's share price, which stood at 890p on election day, is now 693p.

ROBERT EARL, founder of Planet Hollywood, gave "new" Labour £1m in November 1997 to replace the donation that had been handed back to Bernie Ecclestone. Planet Hollywood, which had previously been valued at nearly $2bn, fell victim to the Curse almost at once. By 1998 it was posting losses of $244m, and the share price had plummeted by 95 percent. Last August the company filed for bankruptcy with debts of $250m.

LORD SIMON OF HIGHBURY, chief executive of BP, took a peerage immediately after the election and became minister for competitiveness in Europe. He at least had the good sense to sever his links with BP – since when the company's performance has vastly improved under his successor John Browne, who appears to have no "new" Labour links.

LORD HASKINS, chairman of Northern Foods, was ennobled by Blair in 1998. In his first year as chairman of the government's Better Regulation taskforce, working two days a week in the cabinet office, the share price of Northern Foods halved and turnover fell from £1.8bn to £1.2bn. This is partly because of the declining fortunes of Marks & Spencer, one of Northern Foods' biggest customers. And why is Marks & Spencer in such trouble? It is surely a coincidence that M&S executives sit on no fewer than seven "new" Labour taskforces.

LORD SAINSBURY quit as chief executive of Sainsbury's to accept a Blair peerage and a job as science minister, but kept his 20 percent stake in the family firm. Since then Sainsbury's has been eclipsed by its old rival Tesco and has had £5bn wiped off its market value. Profits this year are likely to be down by £270m. Two months ago, the Sainsbury family hired Sir Peter Davis of the Pru as chief executive (on a pay-and-shares package worth £13m over the next three years) to turn the company round. Can things only get better, as the Blairites used to sing? Possibly not: Sir Peter Davis is yet another quango king, chairing the government's New Deal taskforce. Sainsbury's best hope is that the Curse will now turn its attention to Tesco instead, since Tesco's chief executive Terence Leahy sits on the Competitiveness Advisory Group, the Making The Most of the Information Age taskforce and the South East Regional Competitiveness Working Party.

Meanwhile, what hope is there for British Airways, which is expected to lose £250m this year and has seen its stock market value drop from £7bn at the time of Labour's victory to just £3bn today? Following Bob Ayling's dismissal, BA announced that its chairman, Lord Marshall, would be the acting chief executive pro tem. Marshall, who was ennobled in 1998, has been a member of several "new" Labour taskforces, including one on preparing for European monetary union. He has also accompanied the prime minister on a trip to Tokyo to explain the Third Way to Japanese businessmen and politicians. The Curse of Blair may already be lining up its next prey...

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SHOCK ADMISSION

NEWS

WORKERS at Rover who fear for their jobs will be consoled to learn that Sophie Rhys-Jones, aka the Countess of Wessex, is to keep her valuable PR contract with the ailing car firm.

Some cynics believe that Rover has done rather more for Sophie's public relations than vice versa. When she won the £250,000 contract last September, a sycophantic Rover press release scarcely mentioned the alleged purpose of the exercise – flogging cars. "Rover today announced the signing of a contract with UK-based R-JH Public Relations, whose chairman is Lady Wessex (formerly Sophie Rhys-Jones)... Heading up the R-JH team will be Lady Wessex, who has continued her commitment to run the agency since her wedding in June. She uses the name Sophie Wessex in her professional life."

Sophie herself, however, preferred to claim that she was a backroom girl. "I don't see myself as the fresh new face of Rover," she told hacks, explaining that she was merely "part of a team that will deliver BMW's ambitious worldwide plans for the Rover marque".

And didn't she do well! True, almost all the publicity for Rover since then has been entirely negative. But she has succeeded splendidly in promoting at least one upmarket English product – herself.

WHEN it was announced earlier this month that controversial field trials involving genetically modified potatoes would be carried out in Liff, Angus, local community council chair Sandra Hillman was all in favour.

She told the local media that public opinion on GM products was based largely on ignorance. "As long as there are proper controls, most scientists consider that GM crop production is totally harmless," she said. "People should be better informed rather than being bombarded with inaccurate information from the likes of Greenpeace."

And who is Sandra Hillman, pillar of the community? None other than the wife of Professor John Hillman, director of the Scottish Crop Research Institute, which is carrying out the trials.

Prof Hillman is of course the "leading scientist" (*Eye* 995) who earlier this year claimed that GM foods were safer than organic foods. He is, readers will recall, on the board of the Bio Industry Association, whose aim is to "encourage and promote the biotechnology sector of the UK economy".

IF YOU want tip-top standards, look no further than the back of this month's *Quality World* magazine, where Lloyd's Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) blows its own trumpet in a full-page advert claiming to be "the world's leading certification body".

Before businesses rush to avail themselves of LRQA's services, however, they might pause to consider a few questions:

Who certified the quality management system at BNFL's Sellafield site?

Is this the system which the nuclear installations inspectorate described as having fallen down on the job, with lax management leading to a poor company culture?

Has LRQA withdrawn BNFL's quality certificate?

Has UKAS (the government-preferred watchdog of certification bodies such as LRQA) taken any interest in the affair?

If LRQA is really "the world's leading certification body", what the hell must the other ones be like?

JUST FANCY THAT!

THERE was an unfortunate and unreported slip of the tongue during David Irving's epic performance at the high court, where he was trying to dispel the idea that he was some kind of Nazi sympathiser.

Irving, who represented himself, followed the legal convention of calling the judge "My Lord" – except once, when he inadvertently addressed Mr Justice Gray as "Mein Führer"!

WHAT was the real reason for Tony Blair's visit to Russia and his cheerful hobnobbing with the butcher of Grozny, acting president Vladimir Putin?

For an answer look no further than the sumptuous conference being held in London's Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre on 19-20 April. It is sponsored by the Russian Business Chamber of Commerce and has already attracted the support of Russian patriots and privatisers of every variety – provided only that they are enthusiastic about the war in Chechyna.

Guest speaker is the chief executive of BP, lunch is paid for by KPMG and the conference is sponsored by "new" Labour's favourite airline, BA.

"WE ARE surprised," said a recent Commons trade and industry select committee report, "that ministers were not made aware of this controversial project until March 1999."

The "controversial project" was the Ilisu dam in Turkey, to be built by Balfour Beatty. About 30,000 Kurds are expected to be "removed" from their homes.

MPs were surprised because they had some knowledge of the very close two-way relationship between the dam's builders and the government.

Martin Print of Balfour Beatty was seconded to the department of trade from May 1998 to February last year; and Nick Raynsford, then minister for construction, went on three foreign trips with Balfour Beatty in 1997 and 1998. In Egypt last September, he met Balfour Beatty's managing director Colin Ostler, but somehow the subject of the huge contract for the Ilisu dam never came up.

DET inspector David Michael, chairman of the Black Police Association, was so shocked by what he saw at the disciplinary proceedings against Sergeant Gurpal Virdi (see *Eyes passim*) that he almost left the police force.

"I have enough strength to stay," he said in a public statement. "But after I saw how affairs were conducted in the past four weeks of the hearing, and the verdict, I came very close to walking out. There will be more to say in the fullness of time about the manner and process in which the panel evaluated and assessed evidence and came to their conclusions. But while Sgt Virdi is going through further legal processes I will hang fire on those."

The moment Sgt Virdi was convicted of sending race-hate mail to himself, he was dismissed from the force which he has served loyally for 16 years. The *Eye* will continue to report the next stages in this bizarre case.

Street of Shame

HAS the *Mirror* been chastened by Slickergate?

Er, possibly not, to judge by its jubilation at the news that Queen Brenda stands to earn £1m from a dotcom investment made just four months ago. "What this shows is that the Queen has good business sense, plus that magic ingredient – luck," an editorial drooled. "Meanwhile, if Your Majesty has any good tips, we'd love to hear from you."

Quite why Morgan wishes to remind readers of his paper's love-affair with spivvery and fast bucks is unclear. Still, if he's looking for stories of successful investors, perhaps he should clear the front page for the inspirational tale of Mr and Mrs Cruddace from Thames Ditton, Surrey. Last August they bought shares in two fairly obscure companies, SkyePharma and Atlantic Caspian Resources. Lo and behold, both firms were tipped by the *Mirror*'s City Slickers just a few days later. Since then the value of the Cruddaces' shares has doubled, netting them a paper profit of £7,000.

As *Sunday Business* revealed last weekend, John and Carol Cruddace are the parents of Martin Cruddace, head of the editorial legal department at the *Mirror*. But "a friend" assured *Sunday Business* that Martin "was unaware [his] paper was going to tip the companies". So the Cruddaces' lucrative speculation is clearly just another case of good business sense; and, of course, "that magic ingredient – luck".

"Well done, guys, our greatest competitor is our own website"

GOOD to see the new editor of *Business Age* Chris Butt maintaining the tradition of PR men writing about their clients in the magazine without declaring an interest (see *Eye* 997).

The February issue of the former Tom Rubython title includes a proliferation of articles by one David Barzilay, among them a beautifully illustrated guide to decorating the office for success. The piece focuses on an interior design firm which specialises in workspaces, Gifford Grant. Following in the footsteps of colleague Tony Yorke the previous month, Barzilay does not feel the need to mention that Gifford Grant is a client of his PR firm, Barzilay Associates.

***EVENING Standard* city hackette Antonia Feuchtwanger had harsh words for financial news websites on Tuesday 7 March when they failed to react to the breaking news of the merger of Germany's top banks Deutsche and Dresdner.**

"Any share or bond dealer, fund manager or corporate finance executive hoping to look on top of events would have been severely embarrassed if he or she had relied on websites," she said scathingly.

Ms Feuchtwanger singled out for criticism Thestreet.co.uk, Market Eye, Jagnotes, the Motley Fool and Hemscott.net, all of which are sites aimed at, er, private investors who can't invest in the shares of either bank and would therefore find the news of limited interest.

In passing Feuchtwanger gave a gratuitous plug to another financial website, BreakingViews.com, which will provide city comment from June. But she forgot to mention the reason for her vast expertise is that she herself will soon be working in this growth area. In April she starts a new job with, er, BreakingViews.com.

"WHO'S Who on the Conservative Party list?" asked the *Times* last week before attempting to provide some answers.

Among the dismal list of former Thatcher worshippers, lobbyists and special advisers lining themselves up for safe Tory seats, was one David Campell-Bannerman, a former adviser to Sir Patrick Mayhew and a descendant of the British prime minister of the same name.

According to the paper of record, Campbell-Bannerman had been selected to stand in Tunbridge Wells, a town in which he was once a councillor. This must have come as shocking news to the Tory incumbent, shadow transport and environment spokesman Archie "Happy Shopper" Norman, who up until now had no thought of standing down for Mr Campbell-Bannerman or anyone else for that matter.

THERE have always been some right tits at British Airways, but never a left tit — until, that is, ballerina Darcy Bussell struck a stunning pose on the London Eye for the cover of the 3 March edition of *BA News*.

Ms Bussell was so busy pretending to be a swan that she failed to notice her leotard had slipped, providing a view rather more interesting than the Palace of Westminster backdrop.

A NEW entry to this year's *Sunday Times* rich list is film director and "celebrity" diner Michael Winner, coming in at 747th with an estimated £40m to his name.

His entry begins: "We have had Winner, 64, in previous lists but took him out because we could not 'prove' his wealth to our usual exacting standards."

Despite the eagerness to include him, the financial brains behind this year's roll call of the great and greedy still do not appear to have proved Winner's wealth to their usual standards. Their calculations, which they pronounce "conservative", are based on such sound criteria as the number of rooms in his house (42), the conversion of his private cinema to digital technology, the royalties from his films (which surely amount to, er, quite a lot), but most importantly the fact that: "Winner's habits require some serious cash".

Well, they should know: as they omit to point out, Winner's expensive habits include eating out regularly at Rupert Murdoch's expense for his weekly *Sunday Times* column, "Winner's Dinners".

THE Noah's Ark ads accompanying *Times* coverage of the Mozambique floods were bad enough (see last *Eye*), but the paper was at it again only days later.

On the same page as a court report about a fatal road accident in which a driver who hit a pedestrian at 70mph in a 30mph zone allegedly claimed that the victim had "jumped out in front of him", sat an ad for motor insurance for Vauxhall drivers with the copy line "...when suddenly some clown pulled out in front of me".

SOME sections of Fleet Street can reasonably boast of having championed the cause of freedom of information and fought hard against government secrecy. Indeed, newspapers have often exposed industry cartels and cosy deals with government – with the exception, that is, of their own.

The Newspaper Publishers' Association, the industry's umbrella organisation, is currently involved in secret negotiations with the government about the use of more recycled paper in the production of daily and weekly newspapers. As part of the negotiations, the NPA has apparently produced a report rubbishing the green-sponsored newspaper and magazine recycling bill, designed to protect forests and create jobs in the UK.

Although the negotiations have been going on for about two years, neither the government nor the NPA will make the report available for independent scrutiny. Nor will they report on the progress of the talks. Friends of the Earth has appealed to the *Grauniad*'s sense of honour – it has been making a virtue of its current campaign for transparency in government. But the newspaper has refused even to meet and discuss the matter, prompting an embarrassing FoE picket outside the Farringdon offices of the not-so *Greeniad*.

JONAH'S CHOICE OF SWIMSUIT WAS A LITTLE UNFORTUNATE

HACKWATCH SPECIAL

Cool Hand Luke

HOT on the heels of the *Mirror* scandal, along come the British Press Awards to remind us that some City hacks aspire to rather higher standards than the disgraced Slickers. There among the *crème de la crème*, shortlisted for financial journalist of the year, is Luke Johnson of the *Sunday Telegraph*.

Shome mishtake, shurely? Although Luke, son of Paul "Loonybins" Johnson, writes a column for the *Telegraph*'s business section, journalism is not his main line of business. He's chairman of the Belgo Group of restaurants (mussels and chips, served by waiters dressed as monks), founder of Intrinsic Value plc and a regular player of the dot.com investment game. And, er, he was one of the most frequently puffed heroes of the *Mirror*'s City Slickers, Anil Bhoyrul and James Hipwell.

Bhoyrul was himself nominated for the financial journalism award by the *Mirror* shortly before his departure. Luckily for all concerned, he didn't make the shortlist — unlike Luke Johnson, frequently described by the Slickers as "our old mate".

The *Mirror* executive who recommended Bhoyrul for the prize was deputy editor Tina Weaver, who in July 1998 bought shares in Booth Industries just five days before the Slickers tipped it. One of the major shareholders in Booth Industries was Luke Johnson's investment vehicle Intrinsic Value.

Of the nine Slicker-promoted firms investigated by the Stock Exchange last month, at least four had Johnson as either a director or an investor. His Belgo Group, a perennial favourite of the Slickers, was reported last September to be under a separate insider-dealing investigation by the DTI — though of course there was no suggestion of wrongdoing by either Luke Johnson or his company.

Still, he certainly benefited from the Slickers' cheerleading. Last December, they printed a huge puff for the packaging outfit GEI International, predicting that Johnson ("our favourite entrepreneur") was planning a rescue bid. The share price promptly soared from 12p to 22p, whereupon Johnson sold his 4 percent stake — on which he had previously been showing a loss — for a profit of up to £150,000.

"I've never spoken to anyone from the *Mirror* about GEI," Johnson told *Sunday Business* two weeks ago. "I've had very little contact with either of the Slickers."

You'd hardly guess it from the Slickers' column, where Johnson was ceaselessly promoted in the chummiest tones. "Luke Johnson's brilliant New Media Spark keeps rising," they reported on 12 November last year. "Luke called us yesterday, saying: 'You guys are full of bullshit but I love the column'."

A few weeks later, they were hyping shares in Blake's Clothing, which was about to be transformed into an internet business. "No one will be more pleased than Belgo boss Luke Johnson, who holds 8 percent of the shares in the company," they drooled. "But with so many investments in Luke's portfolio, it seems he had forgotten about this gem. 'How much do I own?' asked Luke when we called him. 'Eight per cent,' we replied. 'And what's the price?' 'Eight pence — up over 100 percent,' we explained. 'Excellent,' said Luke."

"Incidentally, old boy," the Slickers wrote to him on 9 December, "another of your companies, New Media Spark, which we tipped at 80p last month is now 185p thanks to us. So if there's any spare champers we're happy to accept, though we prefer cash gifts." As recently as 3 February, even though Belgo had issued a profits warning and its shares had halved from 10p to 5p, the Slickers were still suggesting that "it might well be time to get back into Luke Johnson's Belgo Group".

Johnson's breezy journalistic style is sometimes indistinguishable from that of the Slickers, who were forever urging readers to "pile in" and "fill your boots". "Gird your loins," Johnson announced in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 23 January. "Stand by for action. The fun is about to begin. This promises to be the most exciting season for new issues for years. And if you want to play at the House of the Rising Sun — sorry, invest on the London Stock Exchange — then now is the time!... Make money now — we will not see a market like this again."

Like the Slickers, Johnson is also happy to write about companies in which he has a stake. "It seems the higher technology shares climb, the lower retail shares sink," he observed in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 30 January. "Take the extraordinary case of Arcadia, the owner of such brands as Principles, Top Shop, Warehouse, Burtons, Evans and Wallis." The group operates more than 2,000 high street stores, has modest debts and owns freeholds which might be worth up to £5bn. So why oh why, he wondered, has the share price fallen by 80 percent in the past 18 months, leaving the company's market value at only £120m? A good question — especially since the investors in Arcadia include both Johnson and Intrinsic Value plc. Only a week earlier, indeed, Johnson had turned up at Arcadia's annual shareholders' meeting and harangued the chairman about the company's poor performance.

On 27 February, Johnson used his *Telegraph* column to argue that "the investor who has no ethical difficulties with the idea of benefiting from social problems" ought to buy shares in private security firms, which "offer a combination of a growing market and an opportunity to capitalise on the privatisation of government services". One such company was Orbis, "the leading private supplier of protection for vacant property in the UK". Though Orbis's share-price was floundering, and the firm had considerable debt and an erratic track record, "it is a high-risk, possibly high-reward involvement in the crime business". Any consequent rise in the share-price will of course be good news for existing shareholders — including Luke Johnson's Intrinsic Value.

Johnson's own high-minded attitude to ethics was emphasised in a letter which he sent to Britain's biggest investment groups last month, arguing that companies which don't have an e-commerce strategy are "in breach" of best corporate governance standards. As the *Guardian* pointed out, however, his enthusiasm for "tip-top boardroom standards" is not reflected in the Belgo Group, where Johnson and the senior non-executive director, Marc Jonas, have been granted options over 5 percent and 3 percent of the company respectively by their remuneration committee.

It is nearly 10 years since Sir Adrian Cadbury proposed that such committees should be entirely independent. At Belgo, however, the remuneration committee consists of... Luke Johnson and Marc Jonas. Messrs Johnson and Jonas are also the sole members of Belgo's crucial audit committee — another apparent "breach" of current corporate standards.

Though happy to bask in the glory of running restaurants such as the Ivy and the Caprice, Johnson is more reticent about some other ventures. The online news service citywire.co.uk recently revealed that he had made a killing by buying into various companies — Gearhouse Group, Industrial Control Services Group, HW Group — before they announced takeover approaches which sent the shares soaring. Johnson had also bought 2 million shares in the healthcare company Celsis International, whose shares rose from 7p to 39p after it unveiled a product launch, and he held "secret" stakes in at least five other firms.

Johnson told the *Daily Telegraph* that the investments had all been made "months before any announcement affecting the price of the shares was made to the Stock Exchange". Asked how he felt about their disclosure, he said: "I'm not overjoyed about it but there is nothing I can do. It makes me sound like a right villain, doesn't it?"

Not at all: it's no crime to fill your boots. As Johnson noted in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 12 March, "The New Economy is creating plenty of Square Mile millionaires... We should simply applaud the spectacle." And he should know. The latest *Sunday Times* Rich List suggests that son-of-Loonybins is now worth £80m – which probably makes him the richest "journalist" in the entire Street of Shame.

"Not very busy then, Wadsworth?"

IN THE TEAROOM

THIS is an anxious time for cabinet ministers. If the general election really is going to be in May next year, the prime minister cannot long delay tough choices about who stays in the first team and in which positions they play.

What, for instance, should be done about David Blunkett?

The education secretary has proved himself a staunch Blairite moderniser, ready to jump through any number of hoops to remain in his job. If compromising your principles is a compulsory test of loyalty (and it is), Blunkett is at key Stage Ten. He has even been prepared to describe his own most deeply held convictions on school selection as a "joke", just to stay on-side.

But this act of ritual self-abasement serves only to highlight the real political differences between Blunkett and his boss. Everyone knows – joke or no joke – that Blunkett is against selection; Blair is for it. And the policy wonks are calling for more and more selection, saying it's the only way to bring up standards. Blunkett, therefore, has to go.

But while you can quietly ditch someone like chief whip Ann Taylor – as punishment for trying to bounce the government into a free vote on clause 28 – without anyone noticing or caring very much, sacking Blunkett would be a big political gesture. Besides, it's always useful to have one or two people who look and sound authentically working class in a Labour cabinet. It reassures the "heartlands" and gets the activists out knocking on doors.

As the rumour swells that once safely back with a reasonable majority, Blair intends to enjoy his second term without the irritatingly proletarian presence of John Prescott at the heart of his administration, keeping Blunkett on in some capacity – as leader of the house, maybe – will seem increasingly sensible.

Normally the PM's nearest and dearest would be happy to leave these awkward decisions to him. But recent events have made even his closest lieutenants uncertain whether Blair is such a good judge of character after all. Bob Ayling – "new" Labour's favourite businessman – has turned out to be completely clueless. Stephen Byers, whom few colleagues ever thought the sharpest knife in the drawer, has prospered under Blair's personal patronage. But his pisspoor performance over the BMW crisis once again calls the prime minister's judgement into question. But to whom can he look for sage advice? Step forward Peter Mandelson, who has, luckily, thought all this through already and has his own dream team for the next election neatly written out on the back of a Northern Ireland office envelope.

'Urquhart'

TEFLON Tony is beginning to look a little tarnished.

In the Ayr by-election "new" Labour's candidate took a drubbing from locals fed up at council cutbacks, and they gave the Conservatives their first Scottish by-election win in a quarter of a century.

The Scottish media had piled on the misery by pouncing on the Dear Leader's failure to visit Ayr when he was up for the Scottish Labour party conference the previous weekend. But "why?" ask Tony's friends, "is Tony under the cosh for not turning up at Ayr – when chancellor Gordon Brown was also noticeable by his absence and not a single hack managed to notice?"

The PM's entourage is seething at the now long-established tradition that while their boss always gets the blame for NHS funding crises and the like, Number 11's "Uncle Austerity", the man responsible for HM government's self-denying ordinances, always escapes Houdini-like from censure.

Now the Dear Leader finds himself the chancellor's prisoner once again. Having once been in favour of a tax-cutting manifesto for the next election, the PM faces an ever-growing queue of nurses, teachers and a thousand other good causes, all wanting the government to spend more money rather than cut taxes.

What to do when "Gordy" is still promising to cut taxes and make life even more difficult for Tony? Why, start briefing selected hacks well in advance of the budget of course! Bang on cue, last weekend's newspapers were full of stories about "caring Tony", the-man-who-wants-to-spend-more, versus "mean Gordy" the tight-arsed Scrooge. This time Tony is determined to steal at least some of Gordy's thunder and bank some credit among the hordes of Labour MPs who are trooping in to whinge about Labour's wilting "heartlands" and face his chancellor down. The long-running feud between number 10 and 11 is on once again – and with a vengeance.

THE inquest into Labour's loss of Ayr, which saw the party's "core" voters stay at home thus allowing the SNP to beat Labour into third place, will once again focus on Donald Dewar and his astonishing ability to score own goals.

It was Dewar who ordered party officials to keep popular former MEP Alex Smith off the party's shortlist for the marginal Ayr (Smith then went and backed the Scottish Socialist Alliance candidate). Instead Labour chose the local council leader as its standard bearer, whose enthusiasm for the cost-cutting agenda of the Edinburgh Lib-Lab Pact government led her to threaten the closure of a local old people's home.

LABOUR's Millbank party machine would find it very hard to expel individual London Labour party members for campaigning for mayoral hopeful Ken Livingstone (they would lose half the membership), but there are one or two lefty luminaries that Millbank would love to expel if they do anything untoward.

They include current national executive committee member Liz Davies; leading Fire Brigades' Union activist Mick Shaw; and Unison's London regional convenor Geoff Martin. Mr Martin said: "With 20 years' Labour party membership behind me I have no intention of doing anything that would give anyone an opportunity to expel me. However, if there is a hit list at Millbank Towers and I'm not on it I have every intention of s.ing."

LABOUR's handpicked "have a go" heroes who will try to get themselves elected to the new greater London assembly in May are in a dizzy panic.

So worried are they at the plummeting levels of support for Buster Merrifield-lookalike Frank Dobson that they have told Millbank they don't want any pictures of Dobbo, even a shaven Dobbo, printed on their election addresses.

This is music to the ears of Dobbo's ever loyal running mate Trevor Phillips, who persists in hinting to friends that it might all have been so different if he, Trevor, had been leader instead of Dobbo – as Peter Mandelson had of course once promised him.

A FRUITY addition to the last *Eye*'s list of likely lobbyists looking for Labour largesse is John Lehal, 27, account manager of influential lobbyists Profile Corporate Communications.

Lehal adamantly refuses to name his clients, but he bravely admits that one of his political interests is "health". Deep as his commitment is to "new" Labour, he has been a bitter opponent of the government's National Institute of Clinical Excellence and has complained about the institute's annoying habit of taking the cost of proposed new drugs into account before sanctioning them for the NHS. He has been especially eloquent on behalf of one his client's drugs, Taxotere.

"We say it [Taxotere] extends life for breast cancer patients," declares Lehal in the *Daily Mail*. "What price can be placed on that?" Lehal's client Rhone Poulenc could put a price on it at once: 500 million euros (about £300m) which it made selling the exceedingly expensive Taxotere last year. Lehal is sniffing round the Midlands and hopes to land Jeff Rooker's safe Birmingham seat when it becomes vacant.

PAYMASTER-GENERAL Dawn Primarolo recently made it clear to a delegation of MPs from her own party that she has no sympathy with the large number of freelance workers who will suffer under IR35 (see *Eye* 986), one of the most controversial measures in this budget.

The legislation, which will impose a heavy tax burden on those self-employed people who are deemed to have the same benefits as full-time staff, could lead to Britain losing highly skilled workers in industries such as oil and the booming IT sector as they are driven overseas.

"Can we pay him NOT to speak?"

A wide range of other professions will be affected too, including locum doctors, exam markers, night school teachers and even (shock, horror) journalists. At the end of January a large group of Labour MPs requested a meeting with Ms Primarolo to discuss their constituents' concerns. The newsletter of the Professional Contractors Group (PCG), the lobbying group set up to oppose IR35, includes the following report on the meeting from David Ramsden, the PCG's political director.

"A largish group went to see Dawn Primarolo. According to my informant, who was there, they were treated with disdain and arrogance. DP made a longish presentation and then gave each MP time to ask one question. They were not allowed to ask more than one."

HOME secretary Jack Straw has had the 800-year-old system of lay justice in his sights ever since a study showed that a professional stipendiary magistrate can get through up to 30 times as many cases as an untrained justice of the peace.

Straw is already set to put another 20,000 cases a year through the magistrates' courts system by restricting the right to trial by jury, and is now even more determined on reform.

Ironically, new human rights legislation coming into force in October looks set to play into his hands. The existing system whereby lay magistrates take legal advice in secret from justices' clerks – and where they sometimes ignore that legal advice – could well fall foul of the rights ensuring a fair trial and no punishment without law.

Clerks, anxious to protect their jobs, are urging the Auld committee looking at the workings of the criminal courts to consider making the clerks part *of* the magistrates' bench – a kind of chairman. Other proposals include the lay magistrates sitting as a kind of jury, while a professional decides the law. Or the third option is to do what Jack always wanted in the first place – butcher the 30,000 strong army of lay magistrates and boost the number of the professionals.

THE big government sell-off continues with news that three of the usual suspects — Capita, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Serco — have been shortlisted for the lucrative and highly sensitive contract for running the new Criminal Records Bureau.

If all goes to schedule, one of them, in return for a fee of a suggested £5 to £10 a piece, will be issuing new criminal record certificates for millions of job applicants around the country. Although originally designed to provide extra safeguards to ensure children and vulnerable adults are protected, any employer will eventually be able to demand a criminal record check.

The main source of information will be what is currently the police national computer (PNC) — except that a security audit of three London police areas found that 85 percent of PNC records contained major errors.

NOOKS and CORNERS

WILL government bodies never learn? The prison service has just signed a 12-year contract to develop its computer system with none other than self-proclaimed founder of the IT services industry and old friend of the *Eye*, EDS.

Considering the sensitive nature of some of the material EDS will handle, it is interesting to note that in the US the firm has just admitted to having been the victim of a rather large hoax.

The company issued the following statement on 8 March: "EDS has reported to the FBI... that it and other companies were the victims of a fraudulent procurement scheme. In late 1999, EDS discovered the scheme, which revolved around what were purported to be procurements for a highly sensitive project of Nato."

One "Lt. Colonel A. West" of the United States Air Force and his fellows claimed to be working on behalf of Nato. EDS said Nato would pay for the order for a "voice information verification system", said to be worth tens of millions of dollars, and potentially billions. But after the equipment was shipped to the Netherlands neither it nor the air force officers were ever seen again.

AS the last *Eye* gloomily predicted, trade and industry secretary Stephen Byers has decided against his previous predictions – and his own inclinations – to site the new synchrotron radiation facility in sweet-smelling southern Didcot, Oxfordshire, far away from its present site at Daresbury, near stinking northern Warrington.

The Wellcome Trust, which invests less than 20 percent of the total in the project, and the French government (less than 10 percent) have got their way over the British government which pays for more than half.

Most Wellcome Trust directors have research groups in the golden triangle (Oxford, Cambridge, London) and will find it much more convenient to travel to Didcot than to Warrington. Wellcome director Michael Dexter told the Commons science and technology select committee that there was "a lack of science culture" at Daresbury. He did not refer to the recent Nobel Prize for John Walker, whose findings were arrived at in Daresbury – one more such prize than at the Rutherford laboratory on the Didcot site.

The government's Office for Science and Technology, heavily influenced by the Rutherford boffins, paid £50,000 to ADD consultants for research into the siting of the synchrotron facility. For some reason the government won't publish the research (which is believed not to be notable for its ruthless neutrality), though it is happy to proclaim the result: game set and match to Oxfordshire. ADD can be contacted at 13 Napier Court, Abingdon Science Park... Oxfordshire.

IT IS just as well that health ministers Alan Milburn and Yvette Cooper are not attending the crisis conference in the Netherlands on the global increase in drug-resistant tuberculosis. They would have to admit that Britain's TB vaccination programme is a shambles.

For the second year running a shortage of the BCG vaccine has meant the national schools vaccination programme has been halted, leaving up to one million pupils without protection.

Although school age children are reported to have contracted the disease, both the government and Medeva, the country's sole supplier of the vaccine, maintain there have been no outbreaks caused by lack of immunisation. Vaccine had always been available for high risk groups.

The shortage was caused by production problems at Medeva's Merseyside factory last year. This prompted the then health secretary Frank Dobson to summon company executives for a dressing down. Production is underway again, but Medeva does not expect there to be enough stock to resume the school BCG programme until summer at the earliest.

In the meantime the health department has been scouring the world for an alternative supplier. So far in vain.

UKIP NEWS

MICHAEL HOLMES MEP resigned as leader of the UK Independence Party at the end of January after losing a vote of no-confidence. He then wrote to all members saying he would not stand for reelection.

Lo and behold, Holmes has now "done a Red Ken" and decided to be a candidate for the leadership after all, thus guaranteeing yet more internecine warfare in the strife-torn ranks of the Eurosceptics.

He has also announced that any money left over from his European parliament subsistence allowance will go into a fund for "victims of the EU". But the fighting fund is unlikely to amount to much so long as Holmes insists on staying at the Strasbourg Hilton when the parliament is in session.

Meanwhile his closest supporter, the former Tory Janet Girsman, has been triumphantly voted on to UKIP's national executive – only to find her election challenged by the returning officer, not least because her party membership had apparently lapsed and the photo on her manifesto was 25 years out of date!

A sarcastic comment from a fellow member about Janet's "dolly-bird looks", posted in UKIP's email newsgroup, provoked a stern reply from la Girsman: "Since you are so intent on discussing vacuous subjects such as the age of my photograph, I forgot to ask you: how old is yours? Was it taken when you were doing your national service?"

To which someone else replied that he "would expect something better than this pathetic repartee from someone who wished to be taken seriously as a member of the NEC. As you seem to have forgotten, perhaps I should remind you: the enemy is out there."

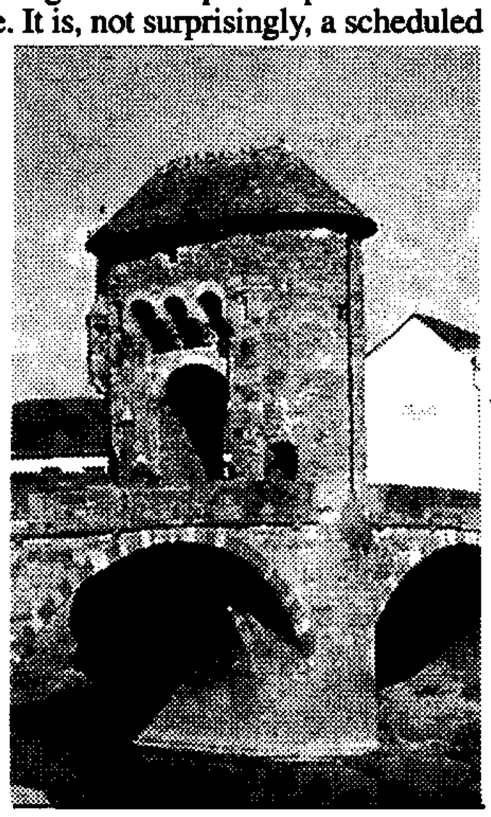
Not so. A random selection of exchanges from the UKIPLIST newsgroup suggests that many members still prefer looking for the enemies within: "How naive can you get??? The new NEC is a recipe for disaster... Your sanctimoniousness is beyond belief... Is this party hell bent on hara-kiri?"

Er, yes.

'Backbiter'

THE WILLINGNESS of local authorities to do the worst possible thing on behalf of the people and places they were elected to look after never ceases to amaze. In fact, they often have a positive enthusiasm for implementing destructive policies. Take Monmouth county council, for instance.

Now Monmouth is an old and charming town, and its glory is the ancient Monnow Bridge, one of the few surviving fortified bridges in Europe complete with its defensive gatehouse. It is, not surprisingly, a scheduled ancient monument. However, as it is a medieval structure and only 23 feet wide — with its deliberate built-in bottleneck — it is not ideal for modern traffic.



As the council has encouraged the building of supermarkets at the southern end of the town centre, a new bridge is needed across the River Monnow. The council is not proposing to replace the ancient bridge but to build a new one close by which will wreck its setting.

The county council, using the engineers Ove Arup as consultant, originally considered five options for a new bridge but soon whittled these down to one. Option one envisages a new reinforced concrete structure just over 200ft to the east of the old bridge. Fifty seven feet wide and 500ft long, it will rise 8ft above the level of the Monnow Bridge.

Dismayed, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) has come up with an alternative - Option 2B. This bridge would be twice as far away from the old bridge, has more coherent connections with existing streets and would permit the enhancement of the banks of the river. Arup has admitted that "the proposal is feasible and could be made to work in structural, highway and townscape terms". Yet at its meeting on 29 February, the county council's highways and transport committee declined to consider the CPRW's alternative scheme and voted to push ahead with option one.

The option one scheme is supported by a few local commercial interests; it is opposed by Monmouth town council, the Monmouth Civic Society and the chamber of commerce, as well as by the Civic Trust for Wales, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, SAVE Britain's Heritage and, indeed, just about everyone else.

Once upon a time the Royal Fine Art Commission could have been relied upon to oppose the spoilation of a place like Monmouth; but its replacement body CABE (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) is not interested in Wales.

Then there is CADW, the government's statutory heritage agency. At first it "welcomed" the new bridge because it would take traffic off the old bridge and the county council did not let on that there was an alternative. Now CADW has written to the council that "we did not appreciate that there was more than one option when we commented. We should therefore like to confirm that in principle we wish to support Option 2 because it lies further from the scheduled ancient monument known as the Monnow Bridge. We consider that this proposal has less impact upon the old bridge."

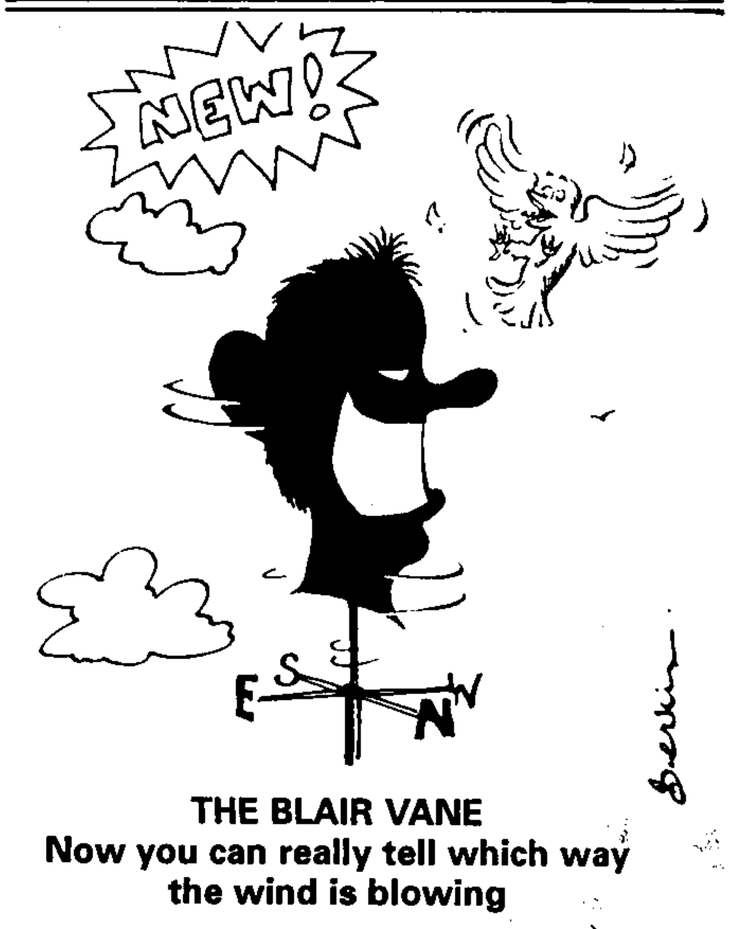
Yet the county council is determined to go ahead with the proposal that has more impact, and is submitting option one for planning permission. Why? The only charitable explanation is that the dim councillors — one of whom really did complain that "historic buildings are getting in the way of progress" — think the new bridge will somehow "regenerate" poor old Monmouth. So, surely, might option 2B. Perhaps the county council might consider how Monmouth can be regenerated by a scheme which spoils something of European importance which tourists and foreigners visit the town to see and which most people in the town are opposed to. But perhaps that is too much to ask.

MEA CULPA. A reader rightly points out that I was wrong (Eye 996) and that the tower proposed on the site of the Baltic Exchange by My Lord Foster will not, in fact, be the tallest in London, if built. The earlier proposal for a Millennium Tower would have been, but not the "high tech cod piece" now on offer from Swiss Re. Agreed. But the cod piece is still very, gratuitously tall and we can surely do without yet another brilliant exciting forward-looking bold and uncompromising new masterpiece from the office of Norman Foster.

But the real point is about the poor old bomb-blasted Baltic Exchange. English Heritage seems to have acquiesced in the replacement of this listed building because it has been assured that it is too badly damaged to be restored. But who says so? Has an independent engineer's report been commissioned? No.

What is interesting is how closely guarded the building has been since the bomb went off in 1992 on the grounds of danger. Thanks to the police and the City Corporation, very few have been allowed inside. So English Heritage's London committee has not been able to see for itself if enough survives to make rebuilding worthwhile as well as desirable. So the IRA scores yet another victory.

'Piloti'



THE BLAIR VANE
Now you can really tell which way the wind is blowing

DOING THE ROUNDS

IT IS now eight years since M.D. first exposed the disastrous results for complex heart surgery in Bristol — and yet still there is no UK-wide system to stop it happening again.

As the Bristol parent and campaigner Maria Shortis puts it: "The only place where we know Bristol isn't going to happen again is Bristol. The unit opens itself up to scrutiny by publishing validated, prospective audit and it costs less than 1 percent of its budget. It's simply inexcusable that other units aren't following suit."

But they are, at least, showing willing. In January all the UK centres involved in paediatric cardiac surgery met together with the Society of Cardiothoracic Surgeons of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and the British Paediatric Cardiac Association. Every centre finally agreed, as from next month, to submit the results of heart surgery and catheterisation prospectively (ie as they go along) to the United Kingdom central cardiac audit database (UKCCAD).

This independent central scrutiny will produce reliable mortality rates for each operation in each unit, and should identify which units are out of line and by how much. Prompt corrective action can then be taken. That's the theory, anyway. It is not yet clear whether these results will be made available to the public in a way which identifies individual units, but there is nothing to stop good units following Bristol's lead and making their results available on the internet. So what's the catch?

As the Bristol example has shown, the audit isn't prohibitively expensive but the NHS is so broke that unless money is ring-fenced for the collection of data in trust hospitals and the central analysis of the results, the scheme simply won't get off the ground.

Prior to the January meeting Dr John Gibbs, Professor Bob Anderson and surgeon Jim Monro wrote to the chief medical officer (CMO) Liam Donaldson asking for funding guarantees for the central database and peripheral data collection. They received no reply, so both Anderson and Gibbs wrote again. Again, there was no reply.

Two months after the first letter, M.D. raised this issue at the Bristol public inquiry (on 7 March) and expressed her (or his) incredulity that the department

of health (DoH) wasn't guaranteeing the funding to stop a similar disaster. Purely by coincidence the CMO finally responded stating his enthusiasm for the project. But there was no guarantee of DoH funding.

It seems inconceivable the government won't come up with the money but the implications are obvious. If heart surgery gets ring-fenced money for audit, then everyone else will want it too. And there's a lot that needs to be done. As Barry Jackson, the refreshingly honest president of the Royal College of Surgeons, admitted recently on *Trust Me, I'm a Doctor* (BBC 2): "I would think less than 50 percent of surgeons know their own outcome figures."

Jackson believes this lack of available information "cannot be sustained or justified" and has pleaded for the royal college to be given the legislative teeth to ensure surgeons audit themselves. But it can't be done without resources. Physicians and GPs are similarly ignorant about how they're doing, and some still practice in near complete isolation with little accountability. As one Dr Harold Shipman told *GP* magazine in 1987: "The system is so slow, the doctor could die of old age before he goes up before the GMC." And didn't he know it.

M.D.

DOWN ON THE FARM

ON HIS famous "on yer website" sermon to the National Farmers' Union, the Rev Blair told Britain's farmers that the best way out of the disaster currently engulfing them was to sell their produce on the internet. Someone who noted his words of wisdom with special interest was Cumbria dairy farmer Jim Webster who, with various neighbours, has for some time been setting up a local website cooperative exactly along the lines advised by Our Beloved Leader.

Of the farmers already signed up for the project, some are offering milk, butter or cheese, others poultry or free range eggs. But around half are those offering quality meat products, such as prime beef, pork or lamb. And herein lies the rather nasty little snag which could soon put a kybosh on the whole scheme.

At the moment Jim Webster, like his neighbours, can still take his livestock by farm trailer to the excellent little slaughterhouse in Ulverston, just 10 miles away. Such a short journey imposes little strain on his pigs or cattle and within half an hour of their arrival, the animals are humanely despatched to a happier world. But this is one of the 250 local craft abattoirs across rural Britain which, over the next year, will almost certainly be forced to close by the ever-more ludicrous regulatory charges being heaped on them by the Meat Hygiene Service, supposedly in the name of enforcing European Union (EU) directives.

So devastating have the effects of the MHS catastrophe already been in north-west England that the nearest slaughterhouses left for Mr Webster and his friends to take their animals would then be those in Wigton (68 miles), Preston (69 miles) and Colne (95 miles). However, the only one large enough to survive the MHS's charging blitz, which falls far more heavily on the smaller abattoirs, is likely to be Colne.

And precisely because this is a large industrial abattoir it is only prepared to accept animals by the wagon load. It is not going to be interested in the odd trailer load of half a dozen pigs or steers brought in by the small farmers of Cumbria. In other words, just when they are getting the scheme to sell their meat on the internet off the ground, the whole thing will collapse because, thanks to agriculture secretary Nick Brown and the MHS, they will have nowhere left to kill their animals at all.

Jim Webster recently travelled up to London to explain all this to an inquiry in the House of Lords, chaired by Lord Willoughby de Broke. For once a committee in that august building was actually prepared to listen to firsthand evidence of what is going on out in the real world, because this is a private inquiry set up by a high-powered but non-political group called Honest Food which is desperately trying to find answers to the crisis which has already driven 22,000 farmers out of business in the last year.

The previous witness was the NFU's top policy man Ian Gardner, earnestly trying to explain why the NFU thinks the Meat Hygiene Service is so wonderful even though it is busy closing down Britain's meat industry. The committee obviously found rather more convincing Mr Webster's vivid picture of Mr Blair telling farmers that the solution to all their problems lies in the internet, at just the moment when his friend Mr Brown, by shutting down all our remaining rural slaughterhouses, is about to deprive tens of thousands more farmers of any way of earning a living at all.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on London Underground

PUBLIC-PRIVATE partnerships for maintaining tube lines are not the only device Labour is using to tie the hands of the London mayor before he or she is even elected.

London Underground (LU) has been ordered to sell off its non-operational property asap. That category will soon include Lots Road power station, which dates from when LU generated its own electricity. It is a large, non-listed edifice just off the King's Road, in up-market Chelsea, near the river. That real estate would clearly be worth a few bob to the new mayor's administration, so Labour has done its forward planning. "Negotiations are currently under way for the sale of the site," said an LU spokesperson.

Initially 30 other non-operational properties will be flogged. "Details are confidential at present," the *Eye* was told. "Details will be made available to bidders at the appropriate time." Meanwhile London Transport Property is seeking a long-term private-sector partner willing to redevelop stations and collect vast profits from the resulting office space, shopping malls, car parks, etc.

Mayoral candidates might try to console themselves with the knowledge that these deals will be far from stitched up by the time the mayor takes office. But Labour saw that one coming too. It has arranged for powers relating to the underground not to be passed to the mayor until the negotiations for semi-privatising the tube have been completed. By which time the asset-stripping programme will be complete and the operational system will be enmeshed in long-term Old Tory contracts which cannot be broken.

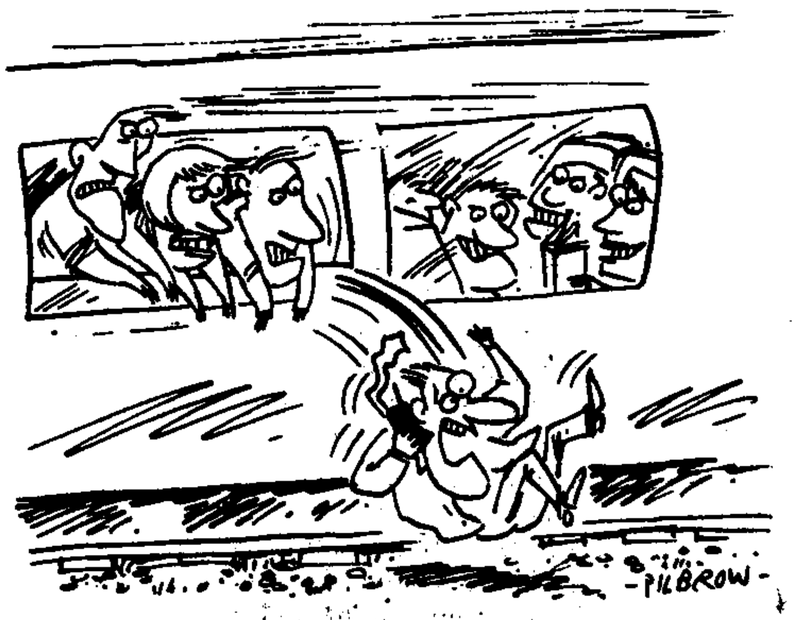
● THE people of Market Rasen have been assured their station is safe although in January Railtrack sold the station building (*Eye* 995) to a buyer it is refusing to name.

Central Trains is the main train operator for the West Midlands, but its services stretch to rural Lincolnshire where passengers feel somewhat neglected. The company tried to counter that feeling by reassuring them that Market Rasen station had never been more protected. "We want loads of people to use it. It is true that the Doncaster to Peterborough line is not one of the busiest routes. The number of people using the line is static, probably because in Lincolnshire the roads are relatively quiet," a spokesman told the *Market Rasen Mail*.

Readers already suspected that Central Trains had only a hazy idea where their town lies. Market Rasen is not on either of the two lines between Doncaster and Peterborough but on the Lincoln to Grimsby line. It is therefore caught up in the grand plan of the rail industry (not just Central Trains) to deny Lincoln and Grimsby — Lincolnshire's largest towns — the services they deserve. Both have lost their direct trains to London.

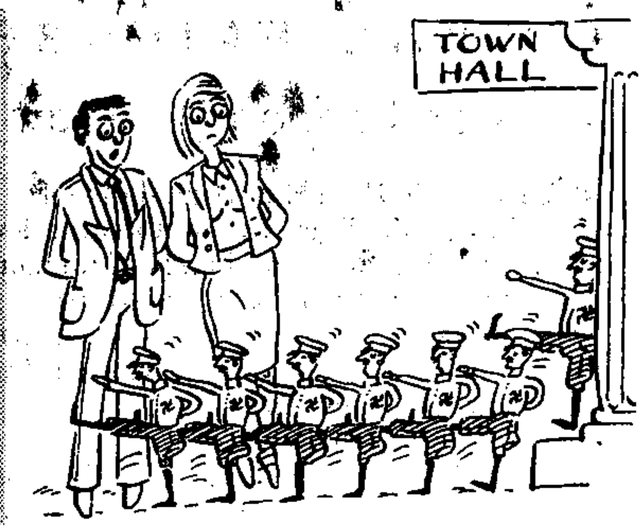
Market Rasen is 117 miles from Central Trains HQ in Birmingham. The company is so keen to encourage "loads of people" to use the station that it leaves gaps of two hours or more between services. The train only turns up when Central Trains doesn't need it for a more profitable service; anyone commuting from Grimsby or Market Rasen to Lincoln at the peak travelling times would be late for work every day and even later getting home if they relied on Central Trains.

'Dr B. Ching'



"Actually darling, make that I WAS on the train"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



BLACK AND WHITE VERDICT

ISLINGTON, heartland of the Blairites, is often lampooned as the most politically correct place on the planet. But it does not look that way if you happen to be black and female and work for Islington council.

Last month the north London industrial tribunal delivered a devastating judgment which found that the council racially and sexually discriminated against five black female housing officers and then sacked them *when* they protested.

Olivia Gerrar, Loretta Mayers, Jennifer Willocks, Cecilia Prosper and Judith Ferguson were among 43 housing officers told to reapply for 27 posts during a restructuring which took place in May 1998 on the advice of our old friends, the local government consultants Capita.

To keep their jobs they had to sit three tests, devised and assessed by white staff, and undergo interviews carried out by a white panel. While the overall pass rate was 55 percent, *all* those who failed were black or from ethnic minorities, and all but one were women. Some white staff, however, were kept on without having to sit any test or interview. No explanation has been given why the black women "failed" — they were all experienced and competent at their jobs, according to colleagues.

One of the officers involved in setting the tests and carrying out the interviews pointed out the odd results to his boss, chief housing officer Andrew Jennings, and suggested they be referred to the then-Labour council's equal opportunities unit. Jennings decided not to, and instead referred the matter to Bridget Emery — a housing officer with no equal opportunities training who had herself helped set the tests.

The test and interview results — effectively redundancy notices — were handed out in front of colleagues and members of the public attending a housing advice centre, causing "outrage and disbelief", according to the tribunal. The judgment said the way this was done was "shocking and not [what] one would expect from a caring employer concerned about equal opportunities and discrimination issues". Jennings, in consultation with former council leader Derek Sawyer and chief executive Leisha Fullick, decided to sack the five after they joined a strike in protest at the discrimination they had suffered.

The council then compounded this behaviour by lying about it. The council's equality officer began an investigation, but was ordered to drop it by head of human resources Peter Cotes. Cotes then wrote to Jennifer Willocks to say the matter had been "thoroughly investigated" and no evidence of discrimination found.

The tribunal will rule on what compensation the women should receive in May. In the meantime Islington is spending oodles more council taxpayers' money retaining the Lib Dem peer and QC Lord Lester to advise it on a possible appeal. Lester spoke in the House of Lords in January about race relations law and said: "None of us can tolerate racism in any form or manner." If only the great man had been advising Islington back in May 1998.

CUT AND RUN

ONLY days after filling the vacancy created by the departure of Heather Rabbatts, Lambeth's interim chief executive Heather Du Quesnay has decided to quit the blighted borough.

Du Quesnay, who beat the other candidates hands down for the interim job, took one look at the state of Lambeth and decided she would be better off taking a £50,000 pay cut as a director of the National College for School Leadership.

One of the many problems Du Quesnay would have had to tackle had she stayed would have been the well-chronicled mistakes of housing benefit provider and FTSE 100 newcomer Capita. *Eye* 990 included a piece about the Y2K problems of the housing benefit system, Academy, which elicited a scathing letter from the executive chairman of Crapita, R.M. Aldridge (*Eye* 991), who complained there was no "cock-up" and that the last minute rush to upgrade the computer system was "planned".

It was so well planned that Crapita has been forced to admit the upgrading was a disaster, issue an apology for the state of the department, acknowledge that complaints are rising by 100 a week since the "upgrade" and, for good measure, admit that the backlog of unopened post is not 25,000 as reported in *Eye* 997 but 113,000.

Fed-up with the excuses, Lambeth has told the "service provider" its contract will be terminated in June unless it gets its act together.

● **NO MATTER how bad things are in Lambeth, things are clearly in a desperate state in the People's Republic of China. A 20-strong delegation, led by Xu Tianxiang, executive deputy chief procurator of Guangdong province, has just returned home armed with a report for prime minister Zhu Rongji about how to tackle corruption, courtesy of, er, Lambeth council's corporate anti-fraud team. Whether the People's Republic is aware of Lambeth's chequered past, or the lack of successful prosecutions of corrupt local officials, who normally leave instead with a fat cheque in their back pocket, must be in some doubt.**

FRANK EXCHANGE

FRANK McKENNA, deputy leader of Lancashire county council, has suffered a sudden and unaccountable fall in popularity among his Labour party comrades.

In a series of stories in the autumn of last year the *Eye* detailed serious concerns about the 1997 return of general election expenses of Colin Pickthall MP, Jack Straw's PPS, for whom McKenna had acted as agent, including the fact that some receipts had carried forged signatures. The response was furious: McKenna threatened the *Eye* with m'learned friends; Thickpall denounced our stories as "Mickey Mouse"; a regional Labour party "investigation" found the returns were "accurate and [complied] with the law"; and McKenna announced, having been "cleared", that he was keen to get the Labour nomination for the parliamentary seat of Liverpool West Derby. Alas in the recent elections for Labour's north-west regional executive, in which McKenna topped the poll last year, he has failed to win a place, while his prospects of securing the West Derby nomination are said to be non-existent.

● **THE heavy hand of the Labour establishment has descended on eight Cardiff councillors who had the temerity to oppose the whacking pay rise which took council leader Russell Goodway on to a magnificent £58,000 for a three-day week (see *Eye* 997). Goodwage also gets £30,000 in backdated allowances. The malcontents were dragged before a group meeting which lasted seven hours. After individual tongue-lashings they had the whip withdrawn for periods of between one week and three months. Touchingly, they now intend to appeal to the Welsh national executive.**

BAY WATCH

THE redevelopment of Cardiff Bay and construction of a barrage has been a great economic and social success, creating 20,000 new jobs in the city. So it was vital the contract to run the operation after the wind-up of the Cardiff Bay development corporation went to the most competent contender.

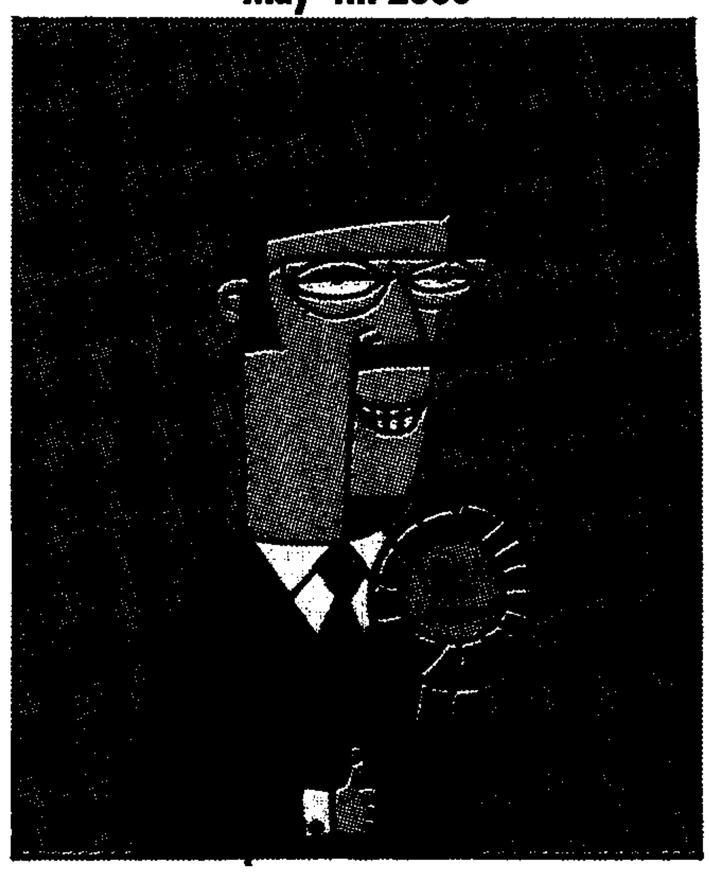
Thus an 18-month European tendering process was carried out and Thames Water was chosen as the preferred bidder. Until last April, that is, when then secretary of state for Wales Alun Michael suddenly agreed a memorandum of understanding with the lord mayor and leader of Cardiff council Russell Goodway (see *Eye* 997). At the last minute, and without having been involved in the tendering process, Cardiff council came up with a bid to run the bay for an estimated cost of £12m, equivalent to the Thames Water bid. This figure has since risen to £14m.

In return, the local authority responsible for Alun Michael's Westminster constituency, Cardiff South and Penarth, will gain an extra £6m in development funds and the taxpayer gets an unbeatable deal which includes the Welsh assembly taking on all the liabilities of the project… plus of course the last-minute recruitment of staff from the company who currently manage the barrage, Crest Nicholson. They include lord mayor Russell Goodwage, his deputy Gordon Houlston and another councillor, John Smith, who all sat on the board of… Cardiff Bay development corporation.

LOVIS FOR LONDON

VOTE QUIN LOVIS FOR LONDON MAYOR

May 4th 2000



THOSE LOVIS PROMISES IN FULL

1. An Espresso machine in every classroom.
2. Tax breaks for designer shops in all London boroughs.
3. Fashion guru Paul Smith to be appointed 'Tube Czar' (with special remit to update uniforms and improve carriage interiors).

If you would like to join Team Lovis then contact Knife and Packer at: knife@dircon.co.uk

Design a gift for Blair's Baby and WIN a fabulous trip to London

He's the leader of the country... she's a career mother on the cutting edge of fashion.

Together they're going to become parents for the fourth time.

But what would you send as a gift?

Are we talking totally traditional or fun and funky?

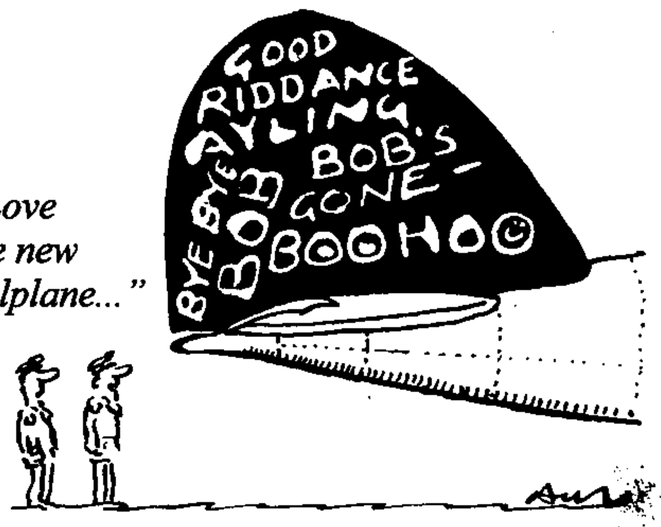
The choice is yours.

The Florist & Wholesale Buyer

Nominated by Mike Ennis.

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

"Love the new tailplane..."



ITV

Hero Of The Hour (ITV)

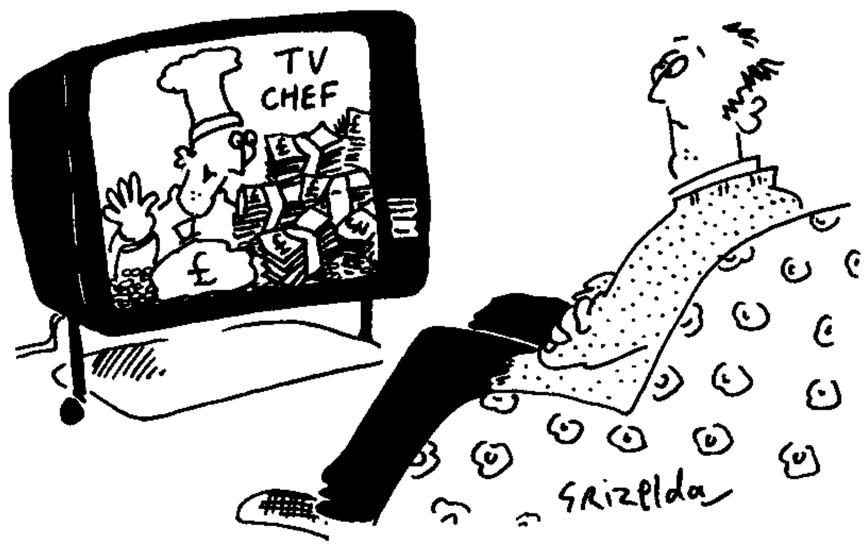
TOUGH life, being an actor. You learn your trade. You play the regional theatres. If you're lucky, you get the occasional ad that pays the bills. Slowly you master your craft, broadening your experience and waiting for the big break, which never comes, of course, because all the best jobs go to bloody soap stars, the talentless one-dimensional bastards!

Call that a career? Because I don't, regurgitating some 23-year-old scriptwriter's half-baked lines every day of your professional life, repeating the same dismal story-lines year in and year out until your character is finally crushed by falling masonry or stabbed in a freak needlework accident. It's a bloody disgrace, I tell you. Waiter! Another bottle of house red, please, and two more of house white...

For it is true: there ain't no justice and there ain't likely to be, neither. The popularity of the major soaps, considered an irrelevancy 20 years ago, has altered TV drama forever. Now a three or four-year stint on *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* or even *Brookside* can be the launchpad for the most stellar of TV careers. Michelle Collins. Nick Berry. Sarah Lancashire. The fat one out of *Emmerdale*. All have escaped from the drudgery of four-shows-a-week soap boredom, not only with bags of swag from their top earnings on those productions, but more importantly with their reputations intact and job offers by the dozen. Amanda Burton. Sue Johnston. Michael French. Suddenly a well-defined TV persona (Michael French: waggly eyebrows; Michelle Collins: head resting on shoulder) doesn't mean you're typecast, it means you're rich. The ability to act is a purely secondary consideration. After all, if you could act, you might be different in each series you appeared in and we couldn't have that.

And so to Ross Kemp, formerly Grant Mitchell of *EastEnders*, one of the more distinctive soap characters of the past few years. Grant had two contrasting semi-personalities: brutal, which usually involved a lot of staring, and kind and good-natured, which scriptwriters only fell back on when they had run out of things to do with brutal. Over nine years Grant saw off two wives, countless dodgy deals and any number of blokes who came into the Queen Vic looking for trouble.

Flexing his biceps and standing very still, he exuded a certain primitive menace and occasionally didn't blink for several months at a time. Kemp, it is said, grew tired of the limitations of the part and began to seek new challenges, which eventually turned up last year in the form of an enormous cheque from Yorkshire TV. Now the bullet-headed one is being groomed as one of ITV's biggest new stars, which is to say that ITV Network Centre is full of executives running around desperately wondering what to do with him. *Hero Of The Hour* was the first fruit of this anxious process.



"...and here's some I made earlier"

And it was, frankly, mush as you would expect it to be. Kemp played Richie Liddle, a security guard, which is to say he was exactly the same as usual, plus a silly cap. Bravely foiling some robbers (whose incompetence belied their hard man expressions and piggy eyes), he took the opportunity to steal £100,000 for himself and then spent the rest of the two-hour film feeling bad about it.

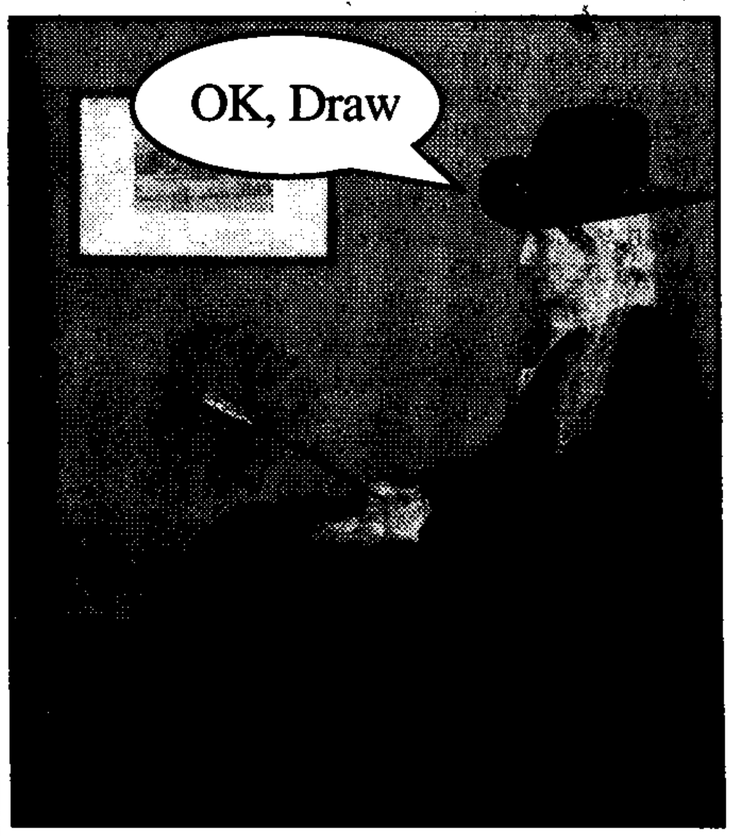
The whole plot had clearly been developed to show off the full range of Kemp's acting skills. Kemp lolloping down the road, looking tortured. Kemp playing with his children, looking tortured. Kemp talking to suspicious policeman, looking guiltier than the word's guiltiest man caught at the scene of the crime with blood on his hands. Long weary deserts of plotlessness stretched across an entire precious Sunday evening, although that didn't matter, as Kemp's fans (mostly female, although he apparently enjoys an enthusiastic gay following too) tuned in regardless: 11.7 million of them, in fact — a 42 percent share, which made it the highest rated new drama of the year. This is the bottom line: the quality (or otherwise) of the offering was utterly irrelevant.

Would *Hero Of The Hour* have been made if Kemp hadn't been available? It seems unlikely. Whereas once you might have thought of an idea for a programme first, and then looked around for a star to fill it, now you buy your star first and wonder pathetically what to do with them. Over at the BBC, Mal Young, Head of Bad Drama, is performing exactly this trick with his entire popular output. As a result, quite capable actors and actresses are beginning to accept jobs in soaps, people who wouldn◊t have thought about it five years ago. But then even the talented have careers to think about...

'Couch Potato'

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Jesse James Whistler

MEDIA NEWS

NO ONE can doubt the BBC's commitment to high-quality programming under Greg Dyke given the following plea from Notting Hill-based Princess Productions.

It was sent recently to one "high profile" celeb who for some inexplicable reason felt unable to accept the invitation.

Dear...

You will know Christine Hamilton as the "battleaxe" who stood by her husband whilst his political career and his integrity were destroyed. She has had a tough couple of years in the spotlight but has somehow emerged as a media icon and now she's ready to talk.

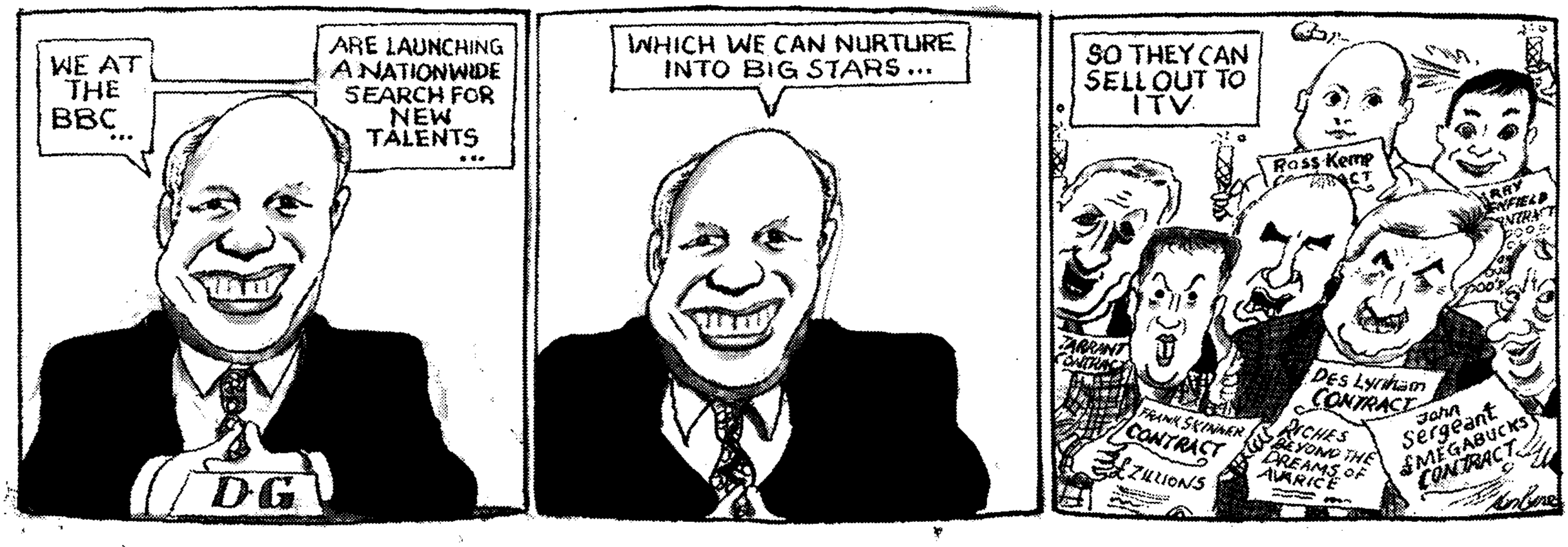
Christine is about to embark on her own series of six, half-hour discussion programmes for the BBC and she would like you to be her guest. She wants to talk to high-profile people who have also suffered intense media scrutiny at some point in their lives.

Each show will be a one-to-one with Christine and she wants to hear your side of the story – this will be a chance for you to have your say in response to the media attention and it could even be a cathartic experience.

Yours sincerely,
Mariana Bubna-Kasteliz,
Princess Productions.

demonstrble understanding of the importance of the BBC's values of accuracy, impartiality and decency

Application guidelines for job as BBC researcher


WE AT THE BBC...
ARE LAUNCHING A NATIONWIDE SEARCH FOR NEW TALENTS...
D-G
WHICH WE CAN NURTURE INTO BIG STARS...
SO THEY CAN SELL OUT TO ITV
Ross Kemp
TARRANT CONTRACT
FRANK SKINNER CONTRACT
£ZILLIONS
DES Lynham CONTRACT
RICHES BEYOND THE DREAMS OF AVARICE
John Sergeant £MEGABUCKS CONTRACT

WHEN the *Eye* reported evil rumours originating in the BBC that Talk Radio was faking its soccer coverage, the station's suave proprietor Kelvin Mackenzie was most indignant.

The very idea that a man of his stature would try to save money by ordering commentators not to attend matches, but sit in the studio watching Sky while technicians added sound effects to make the report sound like a genuine outside broadcast, left him incandescent with rage.

Such rumours were clearly untrue and, despite Rupert Murdoch's shareholding in Talk, there was absolutely no link up with Sky, which would be most upset if its TV rights were infringed in such a diabolical manner. Interestingly, although the Radio Authority doesn't seem particularly bothered by what's going on (or not) at Talk, the football authorities who ultimately own copyright on match commentaries have been less complacent.

As a result Talk Sport, as it is currently known, has been forced to apologise for faking match coverage. Predictably, on receiving a formal reprimand Mackenzie blamed an over-enthusiastic producer *rather than the* man in charge.

In a sense Mackenzie is right to ignore all the rules governing terrestrial broadcasting. After all, Talk was awarded its licence on a business plan which promised a 24-hour news and current affairs channel. But Mackenzie rapidly ditched the format without any adverse consequences.

Still, the ratings are going up whenever there's a bit of decent sport on (real or imagined). Although quite how the arrival in the studio last week of Mohamed Fayed and Max Clifford to attempt to rubbish Trevor Rees-Jones qualifies as sport is unclear.

THE following urgent memo was despatched two weeks ago by the assistant producer of Tomorrow's World, Miranda Eadie, to all staff in the BBC's science TV unit. "Anyone know any famous people who look like their dogs and who might have the spirit to appear on Tomorrow's World? Would appreciate any suggestions."

Dumbing down at the BBC? Surely not...

AS chairman of the Radio Authority, Richard Hooper is responsible for Britain's innumerable pop-orientated commercial radio stations, so he was of course an honoured guest at the Brit awards. But it seems he hasn't quite got the hang of, er, young people's music.

As soon as Latin heart-throb Ricky Martin came on stage, diners at the other tables erupted in a clumsy frenzy of dancing. Hooper, however, kept his buttocks firmly clenched, stayed resolutely in his seat, cupped his hands and bellowed at the table in front: "SIT DOWN!"

The order was repeated several times, fortissimo, but universally ignored. Furious at this anarchic insubordination, Hooper picked up a glass of water and threw it at the revellers in front. Mayhem swiftly ensued, as music-biz types from a neighbouring table rushed at the still-seated Hooper, who was saved only by the intervention of two colleagues.

Thanks to his water-chucking tendencies, Hooper is now known around the Radio Authority office as OFWAT.

WHAT will the culture, media and sport committee report due on Wednesday 22 March and entitled "Whatever happened to *News at Ten*?" make of ITV's pisspoor *Tonight With Trevor MacDonald*?

The show recently ran a feature accusing TV bosses of screening too many "docusex" programmes in a cynical attempt to increase viewing figures.

Extensive footage from the aforementioned ratings winners shown on *Tonight* to illustrate the point was not of course a cynical attempt to claw back some of the two million viewers lost when the channel killed off *News at Ten*... or was it?

HAVE the savage cutbacks at Anglia TV helped drive one overworked employee to his death?

Clive Allison, a talented and highly popular picture editor, died in a car crash in Norwich. He had been openly warning that he was at breaking point because of his unbearable workload. As one of the few experienced hands left at Anglia – where many older, skilled staff have been replaced by cheap-labour "trainees" – he often worked 14-hour shifts.

It was after yet another such shift, exhausted and demoralised, that Allison crashed his car. He leaves a wife and two small daughters whom he adored.

IN HIS maiden speech to BBC employees Greg Dyke promised to reexamine Sir John Birt's producer choice scheme, which saw many contracts awarded outside the Beeb.

"We need to look at how much of our money we are spending hiring resources outside the BBC when we have the same resources lying idle," said Dyke.

In Wales at least his words seem to have gone unheeded. In the latest round of tenders at the start of the month, BBC Resources Wales attempted to recover the Wales News contract it lost two years ago to independent company Gigatel. BBC staff and equipment had been deemed too expensive, so this time around Resources Wales put in a very competitive bid to match Gigatel.

The financial manager of Wales News, David May, expressed concern, however, that Gigatel would go out of business if it failed to gain the contract. On announcing that Gigatel had indeed secured the two-year deal, May and fellow news guru Gerry Thurston said that although Resources put in a good bid, a low price wasn't everything.

It appears one legacy of the Birt era Dyke has yet to confront is the charitable notion that failing firms should be propped up with licence fee money.

THE BBC's news website couldn't make up its mind about Bob Ayling's resignation as chief executive of British Airways.

"The news that Bob Ayling has resigned as head of British Airways comes as little surprise to the stock market," reported BBC Online's business service on the morning of 10 March under the heading BA boss comes down to earth.

Minutes later a different picture was suddenly emerging under the heading "BA boss resigns". "The resignation has surprised the City, although many analysts have been calling for a new boss with fresh ideas to turn round the airline's fortunes."

Surprised... not surprised... you decide.

"We're looking for an actress who can sum up the depth, power and contradictions of modern womanhood... with her top off"

ART NEWS

BRITART bad girl and failed Turner prize nominee Tracy Emin is planning to leave behind the world of used condoms, soiled sheets and empty vodka bottles to follow in the footsteps of Miss Jean Brodie.

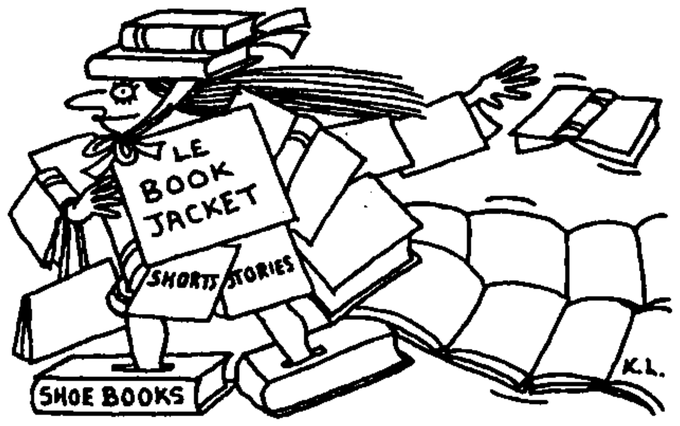
Preparations are afoot in Islington (where else?) for Trace to take part in "workshops" for primary school children as part of an "Art in Sacred Spaces" scheme for three weeks from 21 May. She-of-the-unmade-bed has been brought on board by her chum Margaret Evans, assistant vicar of St Stephen's, Canonbury, who plans to fill the churches of north and east London with "Britart", including a giant "Last Supper" by master butcher Damien Hirst which will be shown in St Stephen's.

Trace could certainly pass on her skills in a number of subjects to the little ones. Embroidery: "Now daisy-stitch the names of everyone you've shagged on to a nice, colourful canopy, children!" Domestic science: "Sharpen those hospital corners, gels!" Vocabulary? Er, does the Rev Margaret know how colourful it gets when Trace is pissed up? And then, of course, there's PE. In July 1997 Tracey Emin boasted to Miranda Sawyer in an *Observer* interview that she had, as a girl in Margate, once killed a school dinner lady by throwing a medicine ball at her (*Eye* 930). "I was happy about that, yeah," she said. Many people think Ms Emin has been getting away with murder ever since.

Pseuds Corner

'Street Life' [poem by Alan Jenkins] is almost Conradian in its resignation to the presence of darkness in the human soul – 'I paid her twenty quid and pushed it up her, dry and tight.' This is informed and learned poetry, but always available, familiar and non-pedantic.

JOHN KINSELLA
Observer



I like to believe you can absorb books without actually having to read them! My library is like an outer garment. I need to rummage in its pockets to find the key.

MARINA WARNER
The Times

For the last number the band [Queen Adreena] gradually leave the stage until she [Katie Jane Garside] is alone in the spotlight, repeating her mantra like a strange figure on a music box: "I only make love to Jesus," she intones. "I only fuck God." With that, she slowly walks off. Freedom puts a jacket round her shoulders, and the crowd stand stunned. There is no need for an encore.

LUCY O'BRIEN
Guardian

The sphere is a core element of Arthur Andersen's new visual identity. In a two-dimensional form, it is locked with the Arthur Andersen wordmark to form our logo. In this setting, it represents the single, global symbol of Arthur Andersen. In a three-dimensional form, it appears spontaneously in certain settings to represent our spirit.

The sphere embodies the attributes for which we want Arthur Andersen to be known. It is constant, and therefore, represents one firm. It is bold, inventive and maverick, symbolizing a successful and dynamic organization in the new economy. It is a global, unifying symbol that transcends language and culture. It has energy, power and warmth. It has critical mass. It is inquisitive and challenging. Hence, it stands for everything that is Arthur Andersen.

Visit the Arthur Andersen brand site to learn more about the sphere and how to use it in a positive and consistent way.

Arthur Andersen web-site

Nonetheless, Maturin's [hero of Patrick O'Brian novels] polymathic reach – multilingual, highly politicized, ethnically hybrid, and hypereducated – make him the ideal fictional vector.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS
New York Review of Books

I was in floods of tears recently over a piece by Alan Titchmarsh about Nelson Mandela's garden.

ROSIE BOYCOTT
Observer

We were plagued in philosophy class by the question of the Hammer: the handle breaks and we replace the handle. Later the head breaks, and we replace the head. Is it now the same hammer? The question of the Hammer could be argued yea or nay; but the moths have eaten my black sweater, and when the new one comes out of the box it will be by acclimation, by courtesy, and in fact, my same black cashmere turtleneck.

So cloth philosophy serves Humankind. *Shanti.*

DAVID MAMET
Daily Telegraph

CONTRIBUTORS: H. Ferguson, Veronica Taaffe, Dai Lewis, 'Suzykat', Marc Owen, Liam Maguire, Rael Martel.

£10 paid for entries

AUCTION NEWS

A RATHER fishy smell is beginning to emerge from FiredUp.com, News International's much-hyped auction site.

Shortly before Christmas FiredUp offered "a unique opportunity" to bid for a piece of history: "Yes, we've got the front-page plates on which the last copy of The Times this century will be produced, and the first of the new century. These collector's items are a unique piece of newspaper memorabilia... a perfect keepsake for the next thousand years."

A similar auction was held for the front-page press plates from the *Sun* for 31 December and 1 January. Because of the need to change plates from time to time during the press-run, there would be 34 sets of *Sun* plates and 14 from *The Times*.

Early in the new year FiredUp sent an email to the highest bidders – but rather carelessly forgot to hide the email addresses of other recipients. An "email chain" then developed, as some of them complained that they hadn't received any plates even though their credit cards had been debited. Soon afterwards, plates started arriving damaged. FiredUp then offered to provide replacements, raising the question of just how "limited" the supply was. Further suspicions were aroused by the fact that the plates weren't mirror images of the front pages, and bore no ink marks whatsoever.

When challenged FiredUp told successful bidders (who had paid over £300 apiece for the *Times* set) that these were indeed the actual plates off the presses, as advertised. But it has since sent out "Certificates of Authenticity" which state that the plates were "produced from the original negatives", implying that they are mere copies made after the event – and potentially about as "unique" as an issue of the paper itself.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

HOW did William Orbit's *Pieces in a Modern Style* – in which Orbit (real name Wainwright) rampages through a number of classical pieces such as Barber's Adagio for Strings with his synthesiser – get to number one in the classical music chart?

The answer seems to be because the "big five" record companies (EMI, Universal, BMG, Sony and Warners) want to boost classical's market share by including all sorts of non-classical material in the classical chart. (Warners gave no indication that *Pieces* was intended as anything other than a pop or dance album, and Orbit-Wainwright himself described it as "ambient".)

The classical chart is compiled by the Chart Information Network (CIN) on behalf of the British Phonographic Institute (BPI), the industry's umbrella body which is dominated by the big five. Naxos complained that Orbit's inclusion in the chart was keeping its own recording of Elgar's completed Third Symphony by Anthony Payne off the number one spot. Eventually the matter was referred to the independent chart panel set up to adjudicate in such matters (made up of representatives of retail, music and media). The panel decided the Orbit album was *not* classical.

CIN, however, said the panel had been too hasty. A further meeting was set for 23 March for the panel to "examine and consider" the issue further – and no doubt come to the correct conclusion. In the meantime Orbit stays in the chart and the credibility of the classical sector takes another knock.

It is a coincidence that the BPI chairman (and chairman of the BPI classical committee) is Rob Dickens, who also happens to be executive producer of the Orbit album, and that the vice-chairman of the committee is Matthew Cosgrove, UK head of Warner Classics.

LUVVIES

"I think Claire Danes is pretty special and could really touch the world. She has something in that way. Her humanity is very profound, it appears. I don't know her, but that's just how she strikes me."

SHARON STONE (*Submitted by Lisa Grimm*)

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

Letters

Private Eye

Seeds of discontent

Sir,

Prof Krebs is right and you are wrong: the whole GM debate in the British media has been a disaster as far as public information is concerned. The experiments carried out by Puztai were, in scientific terms, a pile of steaming horse-shit, as the commentary accompanying his report in the Lancet makes clear. Look: all human progress carries with it a risk. Current evidence does not give any grounds for supposing that GM foods currently on sale are more dangerous than their ordinary counterparts — what risks are posed by future developments in GM foods will need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Your (and most of the media's) intemperate nonsense about GM foods is oddly reminiscent of the Victorian press coverage of such topics as chloroform anaesthesia or the theory of evolution.

Yours sincerely,
ROGER A FISKEN.

Via e-mail

Lookalike

Gore

Lewinsky

Sir,

If anyone notices the resemblance of Al Gore's wife to Monica Lewinsky, could it blow his chances of getting the top job?

Regards,
GARETH WILLIAMS,

Via e-mail.

Anil fixation

Sir,

I write with regard to the article in your last issue, which claims I hyped up the share price of Dialog Corporation (through the Mirror's City Slickers column) because I had shares in the company.

For the record, I first started hyping Dialog (or Maid as it was then called) in 1993 — seven years ago. I carried on doing this for the next five years, on 47 separate occasions. At no time did I have shares in Dialog — I genuinely felt the company was undervalued.

When I joined The Mirror in April 1998, I continued hyping the shares — on about 15 more occasions, until April 1999 when the share price reached its all time peak of 153p. At this point, I bought £500 worth of shares, registered in my own name. I told just about everyone in The Mirror about this. I even wrote about it in my own column. If I was a sophisticated financial fraudster, I would surely have bought the shares much earlier, bought thousands of pounds worth, not told anyone, and not bought them in my own name.

But then, as I've found out in the past three weeks, honesty gets you nowhere in Fleet Street.

Yours sincerely,
ANIL BHOYRUL,

London NW3.

PS: Even though Dialog shares are now over 200p, may I take the liberty of recommending them to your readers. This baby is heading to 300p by April. Fill your boots.

Testymonial

Sir,

Given the selective nature of quotes attributed to me in Street of Shame (10 March), I trust you will have no objection to my use of the statement "He should go far" as a testimonial from the Eye on my letterhead and business cards.

Best wishes,
ADRIAN LITHGOW,

London W11.

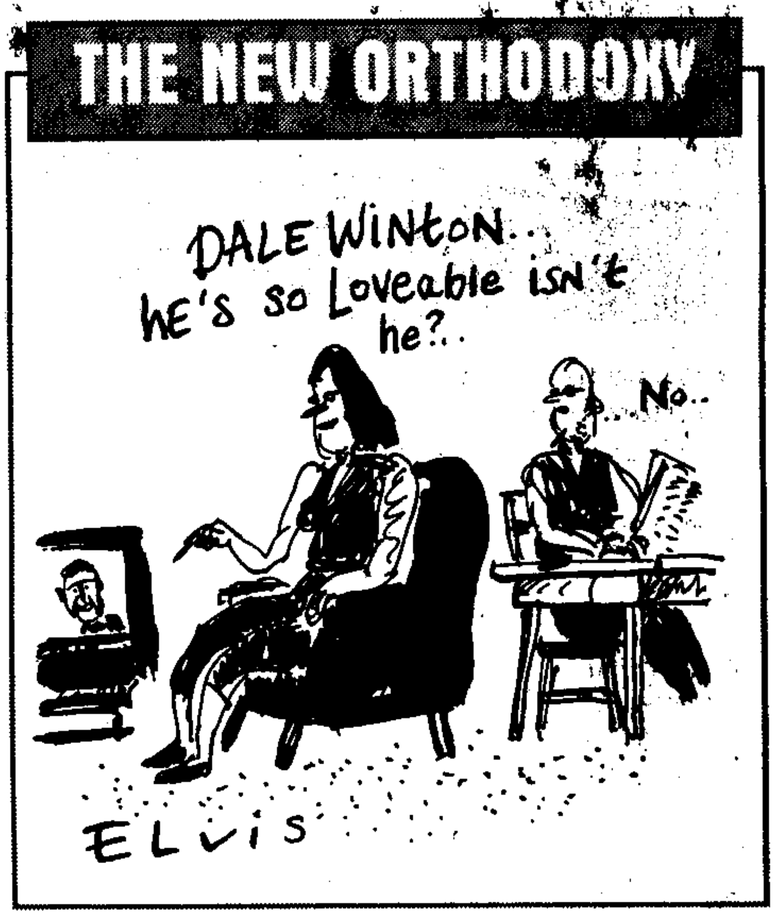
JUST FANCY THAT!

THE EXPRESS

THE NEWSAPAPER FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

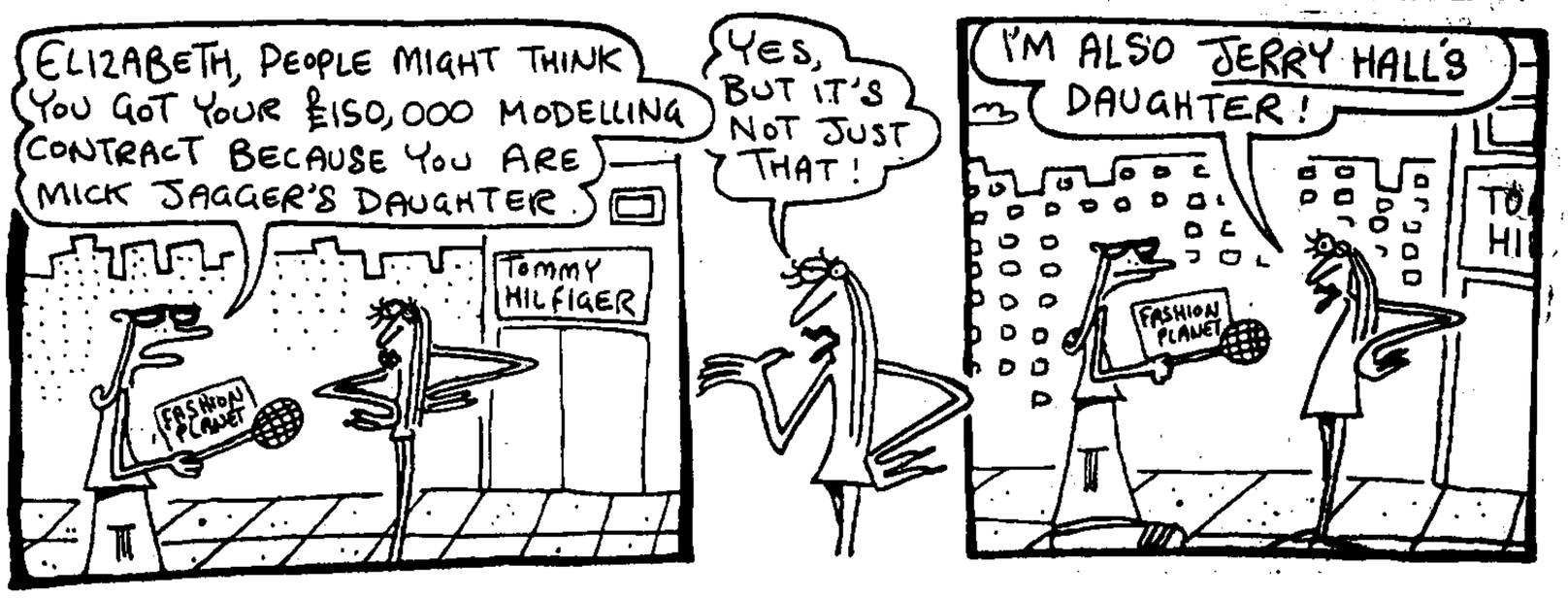
Private Eye 997

THE NEW ORTHODOXY



SUPERMODELS

KERBER


ELIZABETH, PEOPLE MIGHT THINK YOU GOT YOUR £150,000 MODELLING CONTRACT BECAUSE YOU ARE MICK JAGGER'S DAUGHTER.
TOMMY HILFIGER
FASHION PLANET
YES, BUT IT'S NOT JUST THAT!
I'M ALSO JERRY HALL'S DAUGHTER!
FASHION PLANET
TO HI

I-SPY

£10 paid for similar submissions. ***(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)***

No leg to stand on

Sir,

Don't sneer at the misdemeanours of other organs when yours should hang in shame, too.

Douglas Bader's girlfriend in "Reach for the Sky" was not played by Beverley Brooks (who she?), but by the gorgeous Muriel Pavlow.

Yours without an anorak,
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY,

Via e-mail.

Wrong turning

Sir,

Your piece about the roads lobby (HP Sauce, Eye 997) swung slightly wide of the mark.

The government's strategy for reducing road deaths isn't "pathetic" because of the AA and the RAC or Gus MacDonald's membership of the latter's pukka watering-hole. It looks ineffectual, but it is a fact (all but acknowledged by the government) that the remaining, thankfully small, number of deaths and injuries on the roads has bottomed out over the past 10 years or so, and no amount of speed humps and chicanes and 20mph zones has made any real impact on these figures.

There will always be a small number of deaths on the road: this is inevitable. Frail human body versus travelling metal box has a predictable outcome. And restricted speed zones near schools (where, oddly, very few accidents occur), as well meaning as they are, are never going to stop some drunken twat mounting the pavement and mowing down a helpless pedestrian.

The government knows very well that to make a dent in the last, and most stubborn, of the road accident statistics has shown itself to be almost impossible: therefore all it can currently offer are further cosmetic tweaks and fine tunings to the road system. The unfortunate (and reasonable) complaint that so many motorists have is that "traffic calming measures" can be a wholly justifiable and well-planned and benevolent pain in the arse. Raised tables on minor roads can tear exhausts from cars, and air pollution in areas of speed humps and chicanes increases by 200 percent. It is, of course, possible to see these concerns as insignificant when pitted against the injury and death statistics, but we should be grateful that someone with a leg to stand on (unlike me) is voicing the motorist's concerns sensitively, without knocking the government's good intent and obvious frustration. And no organisation has more clout than the big two: the AA and the RAC.

It was a fair point, but not every titbit of perceived cronyism makes a story.

Yours,
JASON HAZELEY,

London SW18.

Prose and cons

Sir,

Literary Review (997), W.G. Sebald.

A writer is no more responsible for the prose style of his or her critics than an idea is responsible for the people who believe in it (Sermon on the Mount... Spanish Inquisition...). If your reviewer wants to discuss Sebald's work, s/he should address it directly; s/he certainly doesn't seem to have read The Emigrants, which is not about "mortality and modern ghastliness", but about the displacement of European individuals around the time of World War II.

And what is wrong with making money out of writing? Relative poverty is neither a proof nor a condition of literary merit. Many a "middle-aged and slightly anguished looking" writer holding down a day job in the public sector earns less in five years than you and some of your Fleet Street colleagues earn in one.

Yours sincerely,
RUTH GERSHON,

London NW3.

US and them

Sir,

Is the forthcoming contest between Gush and Bore a reflection on US society as a whole?

Yours faithfully,
LANCE MITCHELL,

Barton-le-Clay, Bedfordshire.

Norris himself is, of course, a notorious adulterer. There are those who will hold that against him. But his apparent willingness to bend over to accommodate the homosexual rights militants is hardly likely to placate his critics.

Daily Mail

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

Richard Madeley: *What is the capital of Austria?*
Contestant: *Switzerland.*
ITV
(Peter Hillman)

"The film [the Beach] tells the story of a young back-bencher's search for an island paradise."
JOHN HUMPHRYS, Radio 4
(Kath Egdell)

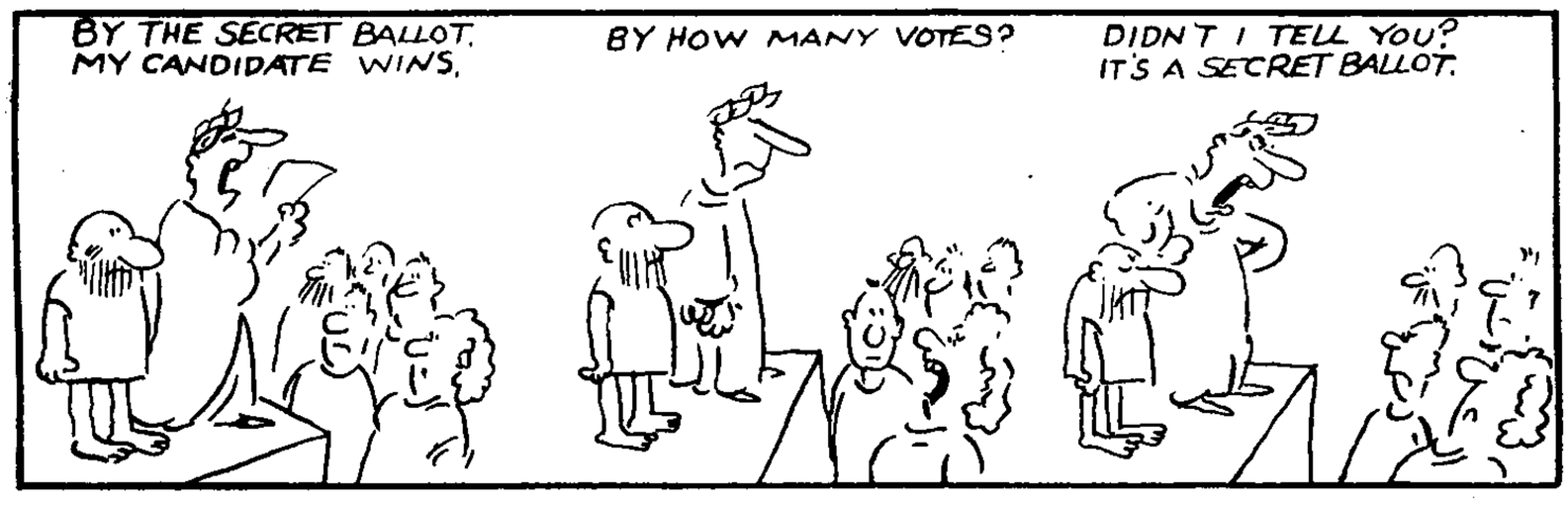
"You're not just getting international football, you're getting world football."
KEVIN KEEGAN, ITV
(Ian Cade)

"The team [Peterborough United] must try to get their ship back on the road."
RAY WILKINS, Sky Sport
(Toby Wood)

"Do we know what sex the cow is?"
JULIAN WORRICKER, Radio 5 Live
(Peter Barrett)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Japan**

from Our Own Correspondent

SPRING is just around the corner, but things are looking far from rosy for Keizo Obuchi, our creepy prime minister.

He may be an expert manipulator of our cosily corrupt two-party system, but he so lacks the common touch that he was once famously described as having all the charisma of a cold pizza. He may have parliament in his pocket, but there is an ominous rumbling from across the country that could mean the old order he so cherishes is beginning to crumble.

Trouble has been brewing for some time. Three years ago residents of Maki, a sleepy town by the sea, organised a referendum that voted overwhelmingly against the construction in the area of a brace of new nuclear power stations. The local council had looked forward to the usual benefits associated with such an essential national project, such as improved infrastructure, libraries, schools — and the long white envelopes stuffed with 10,000 yen notes reserved for councillors themselves.

The referendum was not binding, so the Maki authorities chose to ignore its verdict. The anti-nuclear lobby then put up its own candidate for mayor, a local Sake brewer called Sasaguchi, who romped home. Aware that a successor might succumb to the inducements that the nuclear facilities might bring, he chose to ruin the project by selling a tiny plot of land in the middle of the sand dunes designated for the development to some of his own supporters.

His enemies were furious but Sasaguchi was re-elected in January in a move that has heralded a genuine political earthquake in our normally tranquil land. A week after his victory, Tokushima, a prefectural capital of 200,000 people, followed the Maki precedent. A referendum was organised over controversial proposals to replace an ancient weir that has successfully protected the town from major flooding since the 17th century with an expensive, Thames-style barrage.

Local acolytes of the oligarchy that is the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) tried to derail the vote by decreeing that the 23 January ballot would be valid only if more than 50 percent of the electorate participated, and urging their own supporters to stay at home. Their opponents' campaign was considerably more subtle and called only on people to take part, rather than pushing the anti-barrage position.

In the end turn-out was 54 percent, with more than 80 percent against the project. Our prime minister was horrified and immediately condemned the result as bad for democracy.

His construction minister went one stage further, declaring that "the majority should not be allowed to decide such matters". For the process was not just an unwelcome demonstration of the electorate's apparent newly independent spirit. It also amounted to a rejection of part of the LDP's core strategy to revive our stagnant economy by heavy investment in public works. Worst of all, the vote only succeeded because 4 percent had opted to support the dam; had they stayed at home, the 50 percent threshold would never have been reached!

All eyes are now on the distant, Okinawan town of Nago. Last October the local council controversially succeeded in pushing through a referendum in support of the establishment of a new US helicopter base there by asking voters if they would support the base if it came with economic benefits. In order to split the "no" camp, three other choices were offered, allowing the "yes" vote to pass with minority as the single most popular option.

The real problem for Obuchi is that Nago is also the designated location for the high-profile G-8 economic summit in July. Our more lively Okinawan cousins are already complaining that the economic benefits promised at the referendum may prove to be no more than the town's brand new conference centre. They could plan an embarrassing welcome of their own for the world's most powerful leaders.

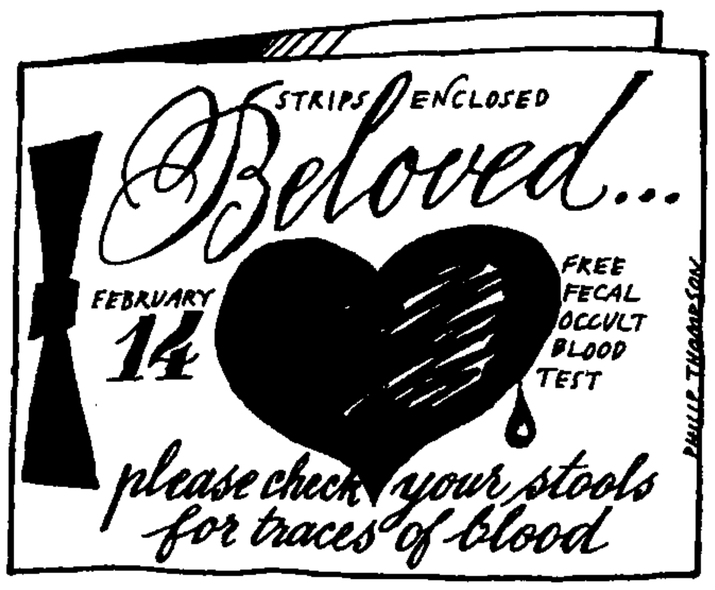
Others are petitioning for the resignation of Nago's mayor for going against the wishes of the majority who opposed the base. As a result, we are half expecting a last minute change of venue. But even if it proceeds, the shockwaves are already spreading through our political system and could spell the end of the road for the pork-barrel culture that has delivered us Obuchi and his ilk.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH

● "No, I don't think they're unromantic at all," said Dr March Seabrook, as he proudly displayed his company's new range of Valentine's Day cards to reporters in West Columbia, South Carolina. "Colon cancer is the second leading cause of cancer in this country, and hospitals don't do a good job screening for it. So, if you really care about somebody, what better gift could you send them than one of our Health Cards?"

Dr Seabrook, a gastroenterologist and founder of the Health Cards company, then explained how his products should be used. "We make a range of cards, for Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, Christmas, Yom Kippur, and of course for Valentine's Day, and they all include what we call a 'fecal occult blood test'. All your loved one has to do is to smear



a sample of their freshly-passed stool onto these different testing strips. Then they mail the strips and samples in the envelope provided to our laboratory, where they will be tested for traces of blood in the stool, a sign that there might be a touch of cancer in the bowel. Each card has a diagram showing how to collect the stool and precisely where to smear it, so the whole test is simplicity itself. And what sensible woman wouldn't be charmed on Valentine's Day to receive such a thoughtful gift?"

Dr Seabrook's Health Cards have received patent 5,954,369 from the US Government Patent Office. *(New York Times, 15/2/2000. Spotter: Elizabeth Christenfeld)*

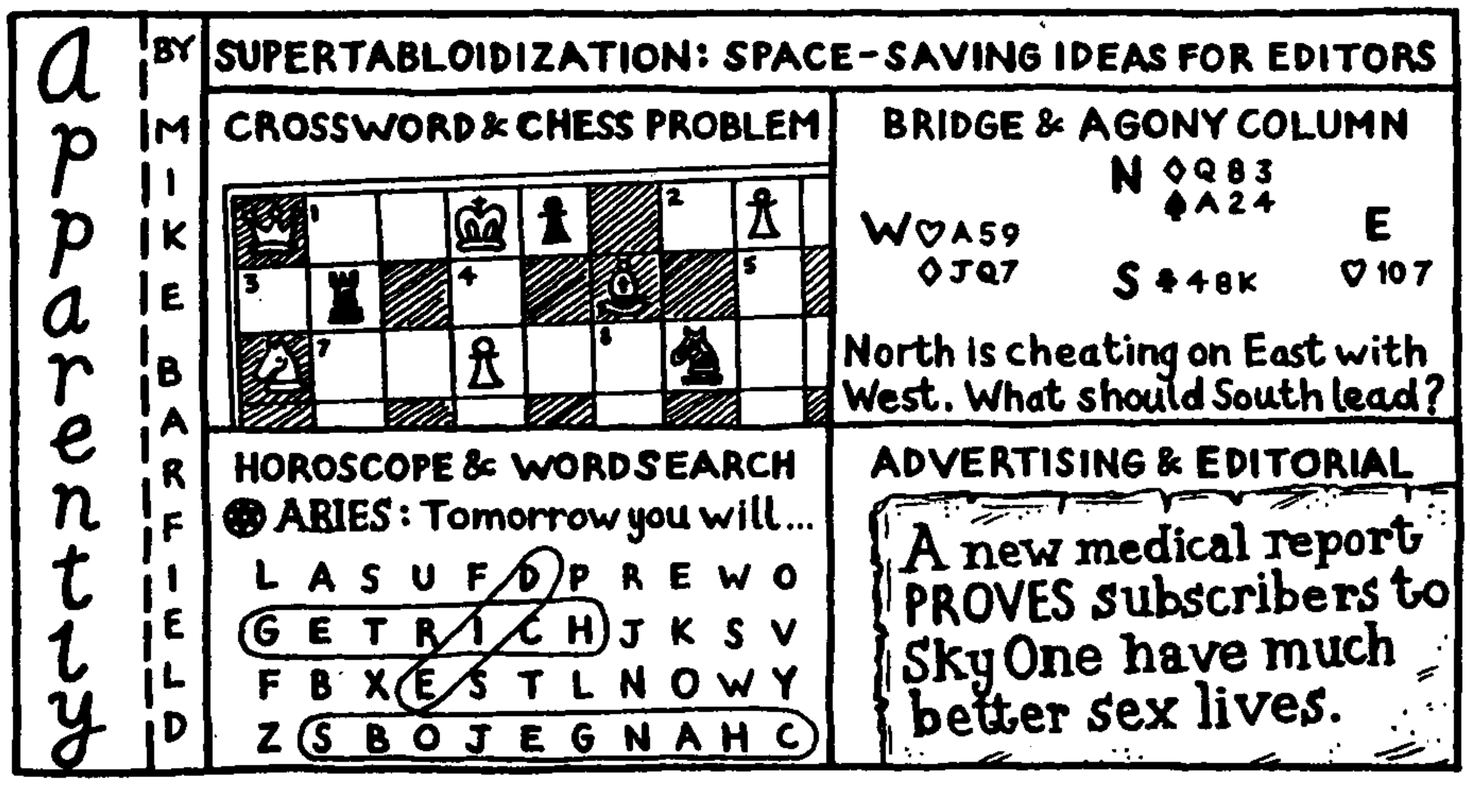
● "We still don't know how the name ever got onto our register at all," admitted Wayne Reid to reporters in Christchurch. "As Harness Racing New Zealand's official keeper-of-the-stud, I ultimately have to take responsibility for the mistake. But now it has been drawn to my attention, I have ruled that 'Buggerme' is simply not an acceptable name for a racehorse."

Speaking at the premier yearling sale in Christchurch, Reid explained that "horses have to be named carefully, because some names sound offensive when spoken over the racecourse tannoy system, and that can lower harness racing in the public's estimation. Yes, it's embarrassing, but far worse names have slipped through in the past. We've had problems in the past with Arab owners. 'Shiite Prince' caused some consternation, I recall. Back in the 1970-71 season, there was a horse called 'Colossal Dick', and I still break out in a cold sweat when I remember how I once let a restaurant owner register his horse as 'Four Quenelles'. Try saying it quickly and you'll see what the problem is. I have therefore instructed the auctioneers to tell all potential bidders that Buggerme's name will have to be changed immediately after sale." *(Sydney Morning Herald, 10/3/2000. Spotter: Andrew Baume)*

— ● —

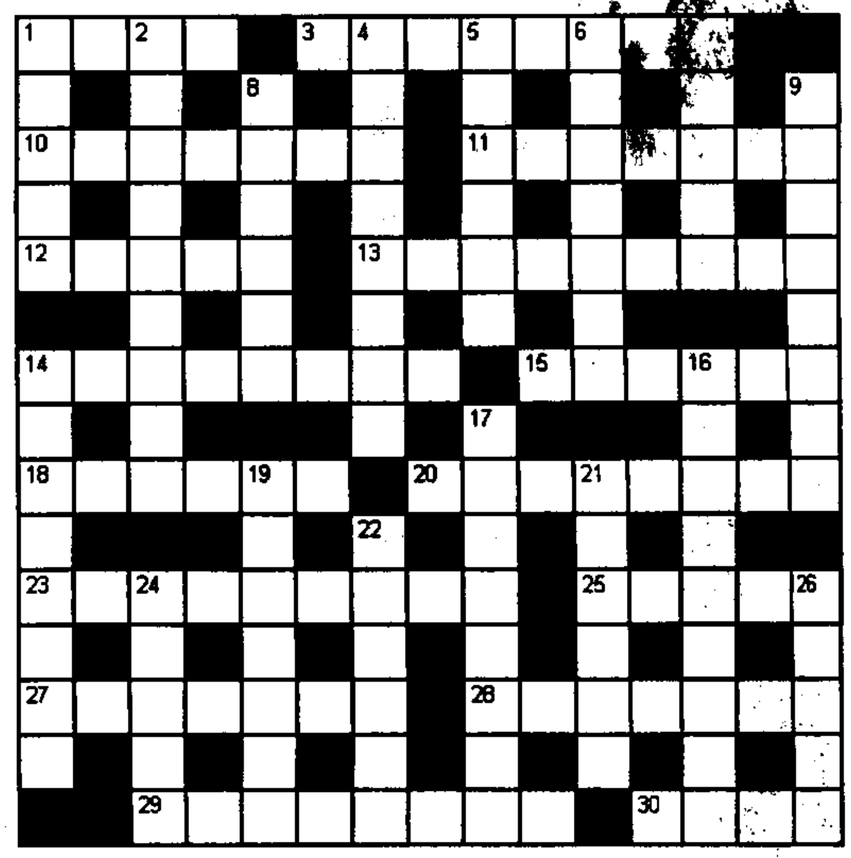
● *"I was overjoyed when the company announced on television that my husband was the first survivor to be carried out of the collapsed tunnel," the widow of Chen Xuexian told a judicial inquiry in Guangdong Province, China. "I rushed to the tunnel to see him, but when I got there, a company official took me to one side and explained what had really happened. My husband was dead, and the people they were bringing out of the tunnel weren't workers at all. They were actors."*

Investigators from Beijing have now uncovered what took place when the Ongyuan Tunnel collapsed in Guangdong province in September 1999, trapping a number of construction workers underground. "The company reported that all the workers had been rescued, and television viewers saw men being carried out of the mouth of the collapsed tunnel to safety. The true death toll was nine, but the company feared bad publicity, so they ordered members of the rescue team to pretend to be victims. They gave them workers' overalls, and told them to lie down among the rubble in the caved-in area. Then they told the other rescuers to pick them up and carry them out in front of the television cameras, as though they had just been found alive. The pretence completely fooled the journalists, who reported it as a successful rescue. It was only when the wives started complaining to the police about their missing husbands that suspicions were aroused. The nine bodies? They're still in the tunnel." (Beijing Youth Daily, 18/1/2000. Spotter: Paul Barden)


a parently
BY MIKE BARFIELD
SUPERTABLOIDIZATION: SPACE-SAVING IDEAS FOR EDITORS
CROSSWORD & CHESS PROBLEM
BRIDGE & AGONY COLUMN
N ♢Q83 ♠A24
W ♡A59 ♢JQ7
E ♡107
S ♠48K
North is cheating on East with West. What should South lead?
HOROSCOPE & WORDSEARCH
ARIES: Tomorrow you will...
L A S U F D P R E W O
G E T R I C H J K S V
F B X E S T L N O W Y
Z S B O J E G N A H C
ADVERTISING & EDITORIAL
A new medical report PROVES subscribers to Sky One have much better sex lives.

EYE CROSSWORD 153

by Cyclops — £100 prize



ACROSS

1/3/9 Boldly regard what our readers do on getting the latest issue? (4,8,2,3,3)
3 (see 1ac.)
10 Have sex only to be subjected to a put-down? (3,4)
11 Die without one's ardour (7)
12 City haemorrhages without capital (5)
13 Head of state gets Ms Hurley a-flutter inside don't you think? (9)
14 Couple doing place out (8)
15 Prescott finally gets other directionless people to oust the leader (6)
18 Incentive: sex the other way round during shift (6)
20 It's passé to hot tongue your ex (3,5)
23 Corporation after piss pot (4,5)
25 Duchess possibly makes boob on live programme finale (5)
27 Dried up fruit makes old dog go on like Ian Paisley (7)
28 Someone underneath Clinton gets out from down under – what a state! (7)
29 (see 1dn.)
30 Backs directions on party lines (4)

DOWN

1/29 Proper twist and joint sought by sharp lawyers (5,8)
2 In the midst of the action, Posh Spice, ultimately no model, wasted time (2,3,4)
4 Thatcher rival allying Kennedy with Bush (3,5)
5 Gold team secures in-house foreign aid (2,4)
6 They got people to talk in stages, tap on (7)
7 Bollocks and guts prepared as food (5)
8 Casanova's salivating holding subordinate (6)
9 (see 1 ac.)
14 Rally and ejaculate with support (4,4)
16 Pissed off desert pal (9)
17 Show willing as Hamlet, maybe? Nut! (4,4)
19 Instruction to one who plays with sex aid endlessly ... (7)
21 ... for those who view sex objectively? (6)
22 Labour leader in the grip of Nick – and Church's grip (6)
24 Register Loren's bust! (5)
26 As taken by students, amphetamines are about the flipping limit! (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 31.3.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 152

Winner: JULIAN CAWSTON

ACROSS: 1 Spanking 6 Palace 9/7/26 Doctor Livingstone I presume 10 Grievous 11 Hangover 13 Conman 14 Party line 15 Ashes 18 Goner 20 Hush money 24 Adapts 25 Universe 26 (see 9) 27 Mugger 29 Susie 30 Sunshade.

DOWN: 2 Pro rata 3 Nut 4 In revolt 5 Gagarin 6 Prince 7 (see 9) 8 Crusade 12 Gutter press 14+16 Pigsty 16 (see 14) 17 Chairman 19 Oedipus 21 Usurers 22 East End 23 Astute 28 GBH.

FAYED TO LAUNCH 'LAS VEGAS HARRODS'

by Our Gambling Staff **Bel Money**

CONTROVERSIAL businessman Mohamed Al Fayed is to launch an exact replica of Harrods in the gambling mecca of Las Vegas.

Inside the replica (to be known as the "Golden Fugget") will be over a million highly trained one-armed bandits who will take money from unsuspecting punters.

There will also be major attractions, including a special "Henri Paul Memorial Bar", in which visitors can drink five times the legal alcohol limit before driving through a replica of the Pont D'Alma underpass in Paris.

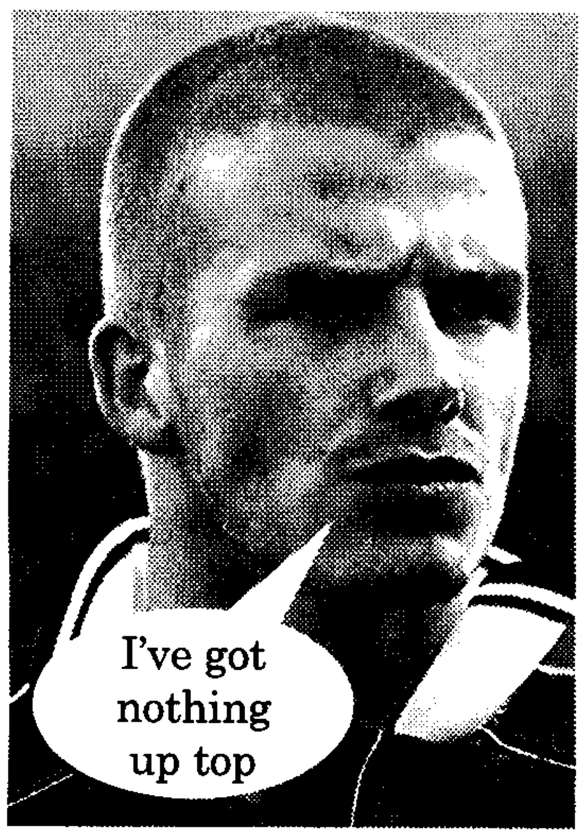
Gamblers will then be encouraged to place their winnings (or "bribes" as they will be colourfully called) in a Harrods safe deposit box which Mr Fayed will then break into.

It is understood that the 200-storey building will be constructed in a unique way – out of millions of unsold copies of the humorous magazine Punch.

Exclusive to all newspapers

YOUNG MAN HAS HAIRCUT

by Our Football Staff



ON OTHER PAGES

● Old man finds blonde girlfriend **2** ● Fat woman loses weight **3** ● Mozambique: millions dead **94**

CAPTAIN OF TITANIC TO BE HONOURED

by Our Political Staff
Dome Jennie Page

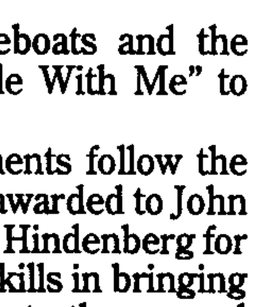
THE Prime Minister is to award honours to all those responsible for the successful sinking of the Titanic, it is revealed today.

Top of the list is Captain Bob Ayling who becomes a Life Peer (Posthumous) in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his skill in launching the Titanic and guiding it safely into the waiting iceberg.

Also honoured is chief stewardess and entertainment officer Miss Jennie Page who becomes a Life Baroness (Dame Dome) for her supervision for the queues for the lifeboats and the band playing "Abide With Me" to an empty ballroom.

These appointments follow the recent life peerage awarded to John Birt, the pilot of the Hindenberg for his organisational skills in bringing the airship crashing to the ground in a ball of fire.

SALLY JOCKSTRAP



ISN'T it pathetic that the entire country's sports writers have been reduced to commenting on a footballer's haircut? Is that all we have to say? Personally, I think Becks has done the right thing because his earlier haircut made him seem effeminate with its blond highlighting and lank look, whereas the new close-crop adds immeasurably to his machismo and

(continued for 94 pages)

☆ GLENDA SLAGG

SIR PAUL McCartney!?! Doesn't your heart go out to him as he tells us that he's found true love again!! And the lovely late Linda, speaking from heaven, has given her blessing on the union between the Rock legend and his limbless lovely?!! Forgive me if a tear is falling on the page as I pen this tribute to Macca's Magic Indian Summer Of Love!!! And should she die as well, I can only pray that Sir Paul would soon find a new love to lighten his long and winding road!!

HATS OFF to Vanessa Feltz – or Sveltz as I'm now going to call her (geddit?!?!). Only yesterday she was the size of an elephant, and now you can hardly see her if she stands sidways!!?!? She's given hope to millions of fatties all over the world!?!?! And how did she turn from Hatti Jacques to Posh Spice!?!?! Who cares?!!!?

VANESSA FELTZ – who do you think you are trying to kid??! Vanessa Fatz more like!!?!

Admit it, darling, you're just as vast as ever, give or take a few tons!!?!

THREE CHEERS for Martha Lane Fox – she's the queen of she-commerce!!?! (Geddit???!) The gal who has crashed through the glass ceiling and shown the world that us sisters can cut the mustard when it comes to conning people out of their money!! Good on yer Martha, and don't spend it all at once!?!?!

MARTHA LANE Fox – Aren'tcha-sickofher??! With her smug smile and toffee-nosed relatives – no wonder the editor of the Daily Telegraph goes all mushy and slushy, a-moonin' and a-swoonin' and a-puttin' her on the front page every day??!?

For gawd's sake, Charles Moore, get a grip, you're a married man with a grown-up newspaper. Geddit??!?!

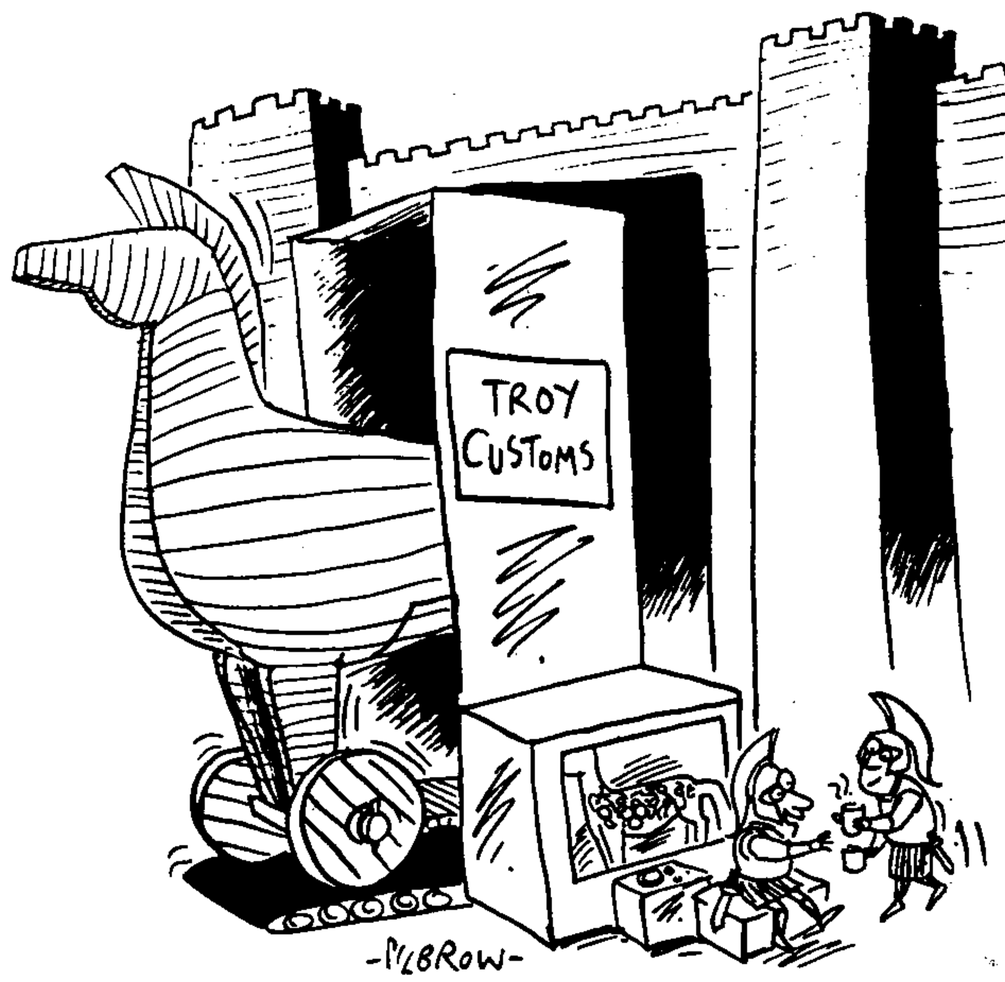
HERE THEY are — Glenda's Mad March Herrs (Geddit??)

Professor Joachim Milberg: Germany's sexy BMW boss. You can put your beach towel on my bed any day, Fritz! And I hear you're good in the sack too?? Geddit??!?

Michael Schumacher: Come into my pitstop, Schumi, and show me your pole position??!? Geddit???!?

Alain de Botton: OK, so he's not German, but I kinda like the sound of him. Crazee name, crazee guy!???!!

Auf Wiedersehen!!!!



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo,

Well, Lent is with us once again – and I'm sure we all enjoyed our new GM-free pancakes, a huge improvement on last year's genetically modified pancakes supplied by Mr Sainsbury, which some of us felt tasted rather too strongly of mackerel!

I wonder what all of you have given up for Lent this year? If you have not yet decided, may I offer a few suggestions?

One idea which I hope will gain favour is that people should give up complaining about those in positions of authority in our parish, who are only trying to do the job as well as I am, in what are, frankly, very difficult circumstances.

And let's not just give it up for the prescribed 40 days. Let's give it up all through the year, and then we could really start to get things moving here at St. Albion's.

I don't want to name names, but I am sure Mr Kilfoyle will know who I have in mind – not to mention Mr Livingstone, who is no longer a member of the parish after his disgraceful behaviour in putting himself forward for the role of Lord Mayor in the pantomime, even after I had made it quite clear that I did not want him.

And now I gather that Mr Livingstone has been complaining that I am trying to smear him, by dragging up details of his private life.

This is frankly ridiculous. It is not my job as a vicar to tell everyone that Mr Livingstone has not been entirely open about how he earns his living and has also been sleeping around with various younger female members of the congregation! Even if these things were true, which they are, it is no concern of mine that he has been falsifying his tax returns and jumping into bed with all the ladies on the flower roster!

And another thing which some members of the congregation should give up are their beards.

We have long since moved on from the old-fashioned idea of God as an old man with a white beard. We now see him as a young man without a beard.

Which is why Mr Dobson will need to shave his beard off very soon, if he is to make any impression in the forthcoming pantomime.

Remember, as it says in the Bible, "I Esau am a smooth man, but my brother Dobbo is an hairy man." And guess which of them became ruler? Look it up in the *Book of Follicles*, 7.3

And what am I giving up, you may be wondering. The answer is, this letter! (Who says I haven't got a sense of humour!)

Yours

Tony

Mr Blunkett telling the vicar about the three Rs – "Rong, Rong and Rong"! Good for David for admitting his errors and three cheers for St Albion's Grammar – always the Vicar's favourite school*.

**This was true at the time of printing.*
A. Campbell (Editor)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ Mr Straw from the Neighbourhood Watch reports that there have been a number of Romanian women begging in and around the churchyard. Whilst Mr Straw appreciates that some old-fashioned parishioners might feel sorry for these women he would remind them of the words of the text "Charity Begins At Calais" (*Book of Enoch, 14.2*). Mr Straw feels rightly that the most charitable response is to deport anyone dressed in a headscarf immediately! Thanks to Mrs Widdecombe (not normally one of Mr Straw's fans!) for her suggestion on the church noticeboard that "hanging is too good for them".

■ Well done, Mr Brown, for presenting his annual accounts of the parish finances to the open meeting! He told everyone that they were actually giving less money to the church even if when they counted it up it seemed to be more! They may be poorer, he said, but they are a lot better off! So, good for Mr Brown, who has shown again how well he can implement the excellent ideas of his superior(s). T.B.

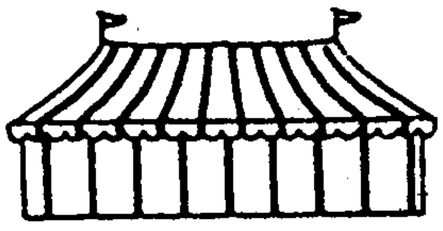
To Remember In Your Prayers

● My sister-in-law Lauren, who I am sorry to say is having severe mental problems, during the course of which she said some very nasty things about her sister, including a description of Cherie as a "trophy wife", whatever that may be. Help her to realise that a period of silence and a large dose of God's gift of Valium would do her no end of good in her deranged state. T.B.

PARABLES FOR MODERN MAN (AND WOMAN!)

As retold by the Vicar

Now there were two groups of virgins living in that time. The one had consisted of wise virgins, who had taken unto themselves the internet. And they did keep awake day and night accessing information on all manner of subjects. But the other virgins were foolish and had no web. And their lives were empty and they had no e-mail. And when the great day came and the Bridegroom arrived, the wise virgins were prepared for his coming. For they had downloaded his arrival time from www.lastminutebridegroom.com. But the foolish virgins who had been sitting around reading books and doing the housework were not ready, and missed out on a very important opportunity. T.B.



MILLENNIUM TENT UPDATE

Mr. Falconer writes: *I am pleased to say the Tent is so successful that Mr Gerbil, who now runs it, is asking for a further loan of £9 million from parish funds to tide the Tent over until the Easter Holidays when things are expected to pick up even more than they have done already. The other good news is the Tent is so successful that we have decided to keep it open all night in the hope that a few drunks will stumble in by mistake and we can charge them for going to the toilet* (Are you sure you want this last bit in? A.C.) *Also, it is great news that Bob Ayling, who has been largely responsible for the success of the Tent, has taken voluntary dismissal from the travel agent where he worked in the High Street. This means that Bob will now have even more time to devote to the Tent, which must be good news!*

GOVERNMENT TO INVEST £500 MILLION IN BLAIRBUS

by Our Aviation Correspondent **Stephen Fly**

THE Government today announced a huge programme of investment in the British Labour Party which would guarantee jobs for all of them for the next ten years.

The project to create a giant vehicle for carrying hundreds of passengers into the next election is known as the Blairbus.

UP AND UP AND A WASTE OF MONEY

Critics were furious at what they called a misuse of public funds. "Why should the taxpayer subsidise British Blaerospace?" they ask, but the government is adamant that the Blairbus will be a symbol of Britain's standing in the world. Said spokesman Stephen Byers-votes, "The original Blairbus was a great success, but this new model is bigger, better and has even more seats."

CASH LANDING

"It is designed to eliminate all the competition for good. The public should be grateful to be part of this great European enterprise. Let's hope it doesn't crash because the wings fall off in mid-term." *(Surely "mid-air"? Ed.)*

NEWS IN BRIEF

SCHOOLS TO TAKE OVER FAILING BUSINESSES

EMPLOYMENT and Education Minister David Blunkett warned that unless high profile failing businesses improved their performance, he would have no choice but to hand their day-to-day running over to inner-city Comprehensives.

"These dynamic institutions are ideally suited to tackle the problems at the heart of British manufacturing," said Mr. Blunkett, who went on to issue a stark warning in particular to the management of Rover that if they failed to meet the targets set he had Mr. Griffiths and Class Seven-G standing by to move in at the earliest opportunity.

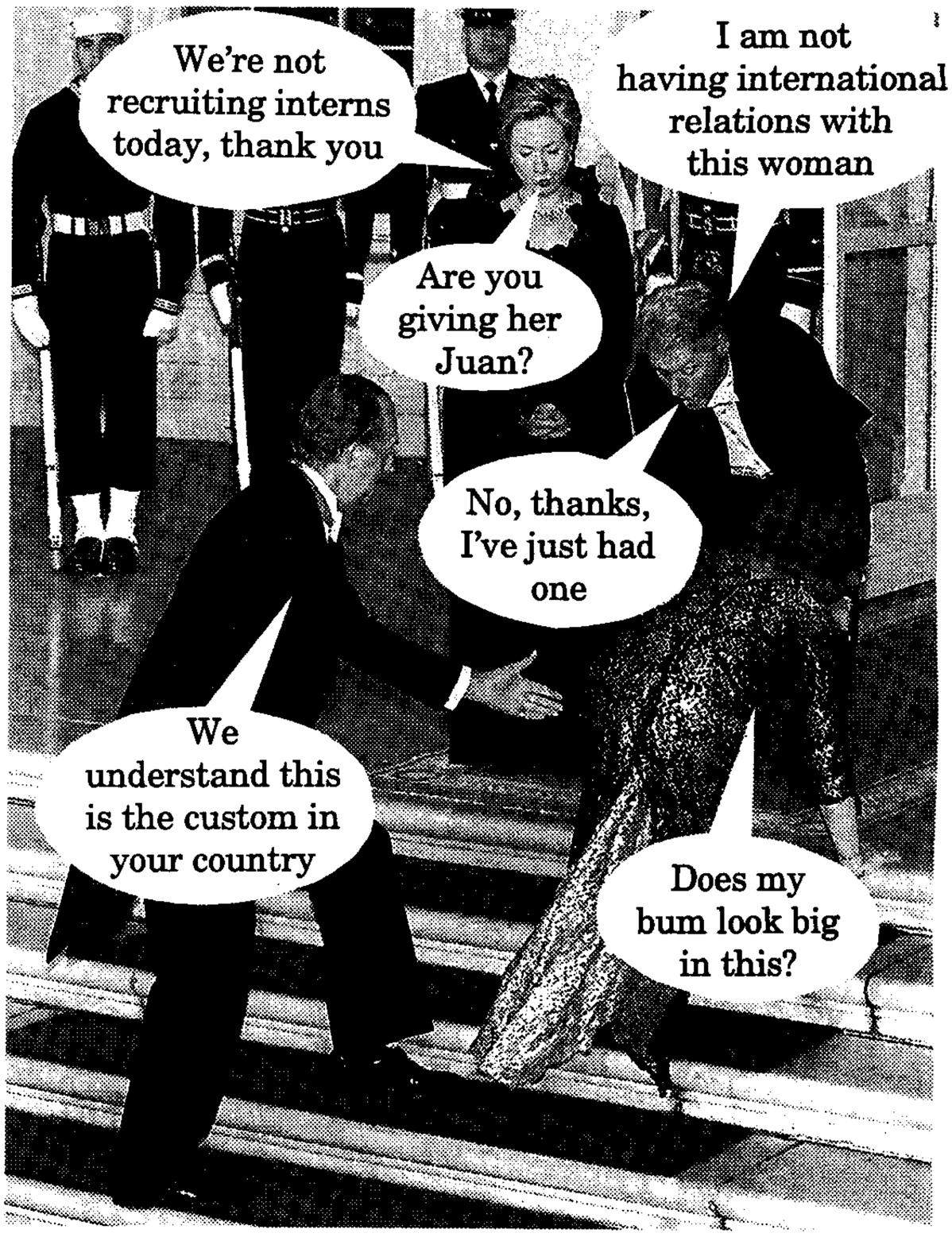
FRAUD COSTING TAXPAYERS MILLIONS

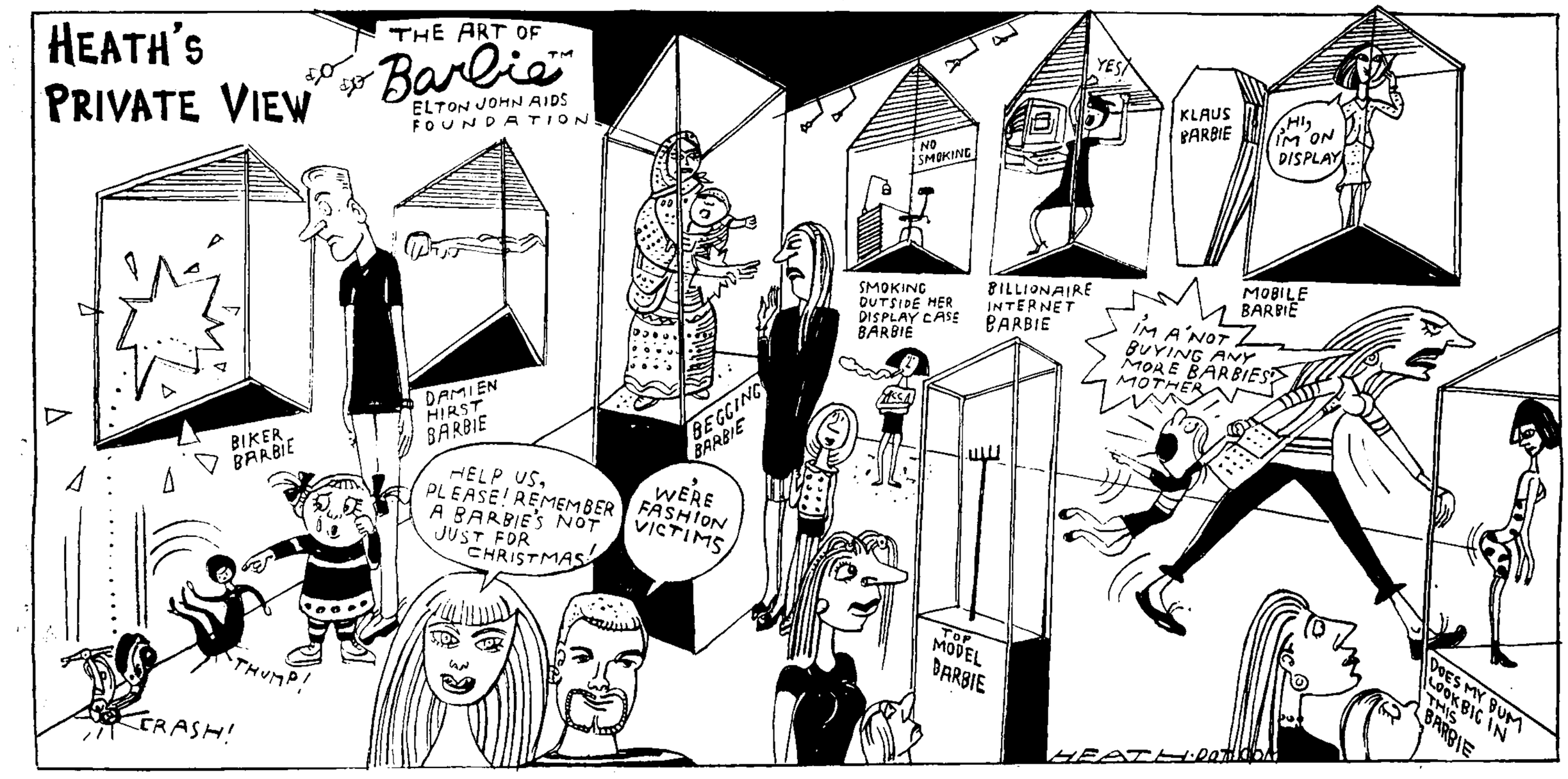
A NEW report today revealed the shocking hidden cost of the "Brown Economy" operating in Britain.

It showed the number of fraudulent claims are still rising. Just last week a Mr G. Brown of London made a false claim that the overall tax burden had been reduced, despite clear evidence that he'd failed to declare some ten billion pounds in stealth taxes.

GRAND CLINTON BUBBLE COMPETITION

A signed copy of Craig Brown's Diaries to each of the following: J.H. Brindle, Nick Rowland, Stephen Munt, Steven Heard & A.C. Hakem.


We're not recruiting interns today, thank you
I am not having international relations with this woman
Are you giving her Juan?
No, thanks, I've just had one
We understand this is the custom in your country
Does my bum look big in this?



RED KEN IN DECLARATIONS ROW

by Our Political Staff **Lord Rothersmear**

KEN LIVINGSTONE was at the centre of a major Commons investigation after complaints by a member of the public (Mr F. Dobson) that he had failed to make proper declarations to the House of Commons.

"He should have declared that he is totally loyal to Tony Blair and will do whatever he is told by the Labour Party," continued Mr Dobson. "He is clearly in breach of the standards expected of Members of Parliament, ie that they should be totally honest about how wonderful Tony is."

Other members of the public, such as Mr A. Campbell from Westminster, were quick to agree.

"Ken Livingstone has been making far too much capital out of his position. He has accumulated hundreds of thousands of votes without clearing it with the Prime Minister. He has got these votes by writing columns and appearing on TV, which is unacceptable unless you are Tony."

Capital Gains

The final word came from another incensed member of the public, Mr T. Blair, who said:

"There is a clear conflict of interest here. Red Ken is only interested in becoming Mayor. And I am only interested in rubbishing him."

Mr Tony Bliar is desperate.

He's back...

CLOCKWORK ORANGE MAN

Cert. PG

VOICE OF The Mirror

voice@mirror.co.uk

KEN LIVINGSTONE is a disgrace. He has earned huge sums of money without declaring them to Parliament. How dishonest can you get?

The next thing you know he will be tipping shares and then secretly buying them without telling anyone in order to make a huge profit.

And worst of all he shows no signs of remorse for his crimes and refuses to resign. What a rat!

Come off it, Ken, you belong in London's sewers, not its mayoral parlour.

© Piers Morgan. www.potandkettle.dot.con

SHOULD DOBBO SHAVE IT OFF?

YOU DECIDE

BEFORE

AFTER

It's the question every journalist is writing about. Now it's time for you, the public, to tell Dobbo what you think. Should he or shouldn't he?

To beard, or not to beard. That is the question.

Give us your "Frank" answer and help us fill up some more space.

Ring the Sun Beardline Now

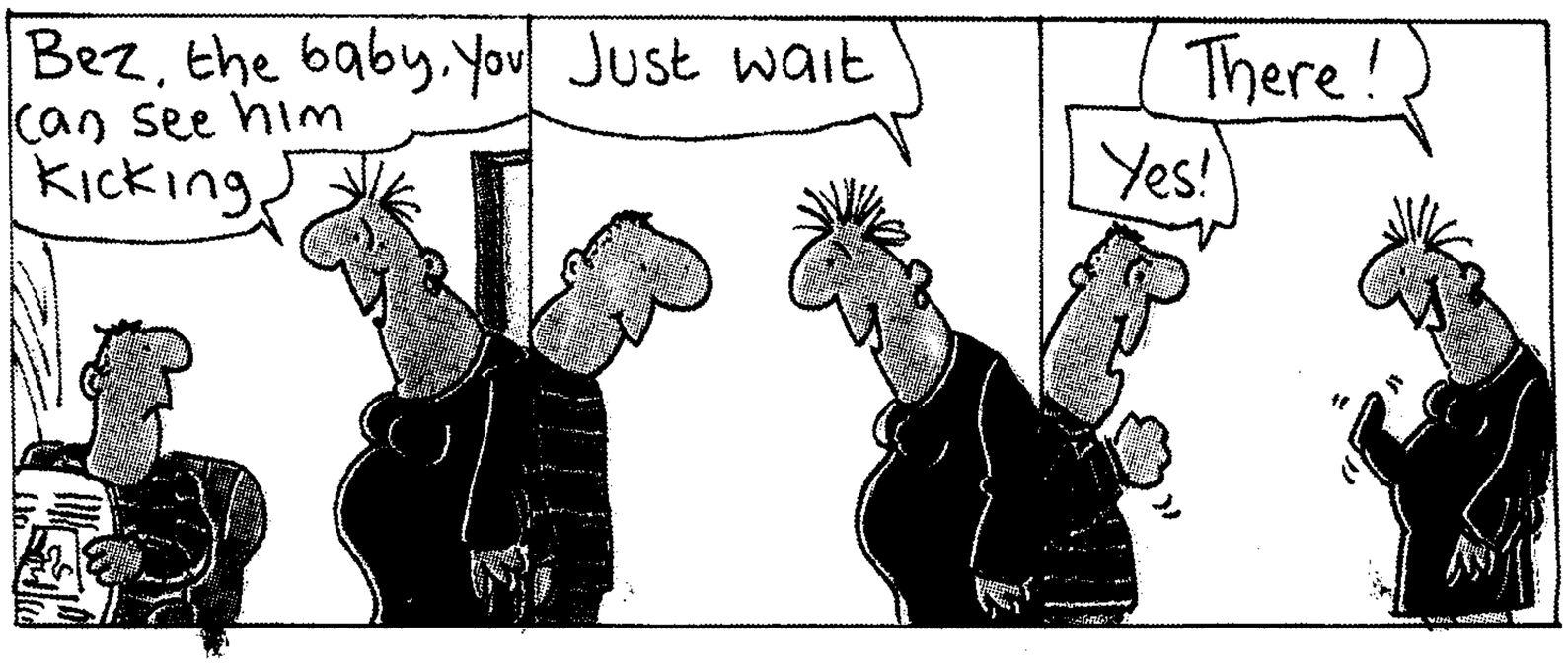
YES ☎ 0800 24713 YES ☎ 0800 24714

TOMORROW: ● *Should Tony Blair get rid of his silly grin?* ● *Should scrounging foreigners like Rupert Murdoch be sent home?* (Shurely shome mistake?)

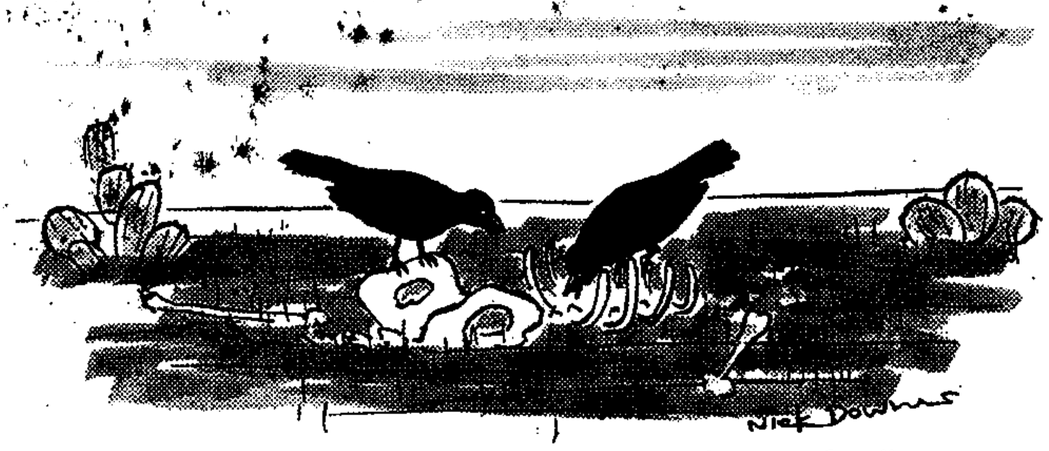
"Those whiskers will have to go"

YOBS

HUSBAND



All flights are from Bristol Airport with Brymon Airways, a wholly-owned subsidiary of British Airways
Bristol Evening News



"I believe in a former life I was a biographer"

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Mind Your Own Business, Bishop!

Says **Dr Germaine Greer**, the Voice Of Reason

THE so-called Bishop of Rochester is talking through his tiny little mitre. In a disgraceful outburst, he has told us that married people should have children. His views are a combination of lamebrainedness, illiteracy and pathetic eagerness to see himself in the news which is so characteristic of myself. *(Surely "The Church of England"? Ed.)*

How dare this married man with the statutory 2.4 kids presume to lecture single, childless women like myself on the subject of the family?

Why doesn't he mention the many men who murder their wives and children every day? That is the sort of thing he ought to be preaching about. What a bastard, like all men.

DR GERMAINE GREER,
The Old Coven,
Broom St. Ick,
Cambs.

DAILY TUDORGRAPH

MAFTER THOS. CRANMER RUDELY ASSAILED BY YE MAD MAID OF CAMBRIDGE

YE Archbishop of Canterburie, Ma*fter* Cranmer, hath come under heavie fire for his views on Holie Matrimonie, as expres*fed* in his new be*ft*-*fe*ller Ye Booke of Common Prayer.

For, saith Cranmer, this holie institution is "ordained for ye procreation of children". "Come off it, your Grace," writ*fh* Mi*fs*tress Greer, ye *fo*-called "Mad Maide of Ye Fens" in ye Daily Tudorgraph. "What doth he knowe about *fuch* matters? He deserveth to be burned at ye *fs*take." *(Continued 1594)*

The Independent 24 March 2000

Showing Off With Hensher

ONE can hardly imagine how it came to pass that someone called the Bishop of Rochester found his view, that married people should try and have children, spread all over the newspapers. I mean, just think about it! A fat fool in a dress who probably hasn't read a line of Proust in his life burbling over the phone to some dim-wit junior reporter too ignorant to solicit the views of a really educated and well-informed person such as a gay novelist with a column in the Independent. As Ivy Compton-Burnett, or was it Chateaubriand, once said, "Anyone who believes in God is a total loony." And as for encouraging people to have children, I mean *urgh*! Revolting little goblins who want to read those ghastly books by J.K. Rowling *(Haven't you done this one before? Ed.)* instead of proper serious literature. As Lytton Strachey once observed *(continued page 94)*

NEXT WEEK. Philip Hensher on Godel, Escher, Bach: an eternal golden braid.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Exciting Times Ahead

From Mrs Ethel Stothard

Sir, Congratulations to the wonderful new Times which arrived on our breakfast table this morning! My husband and I were delighted by the new format, particularly the relocating of the weather forecast from its old position on the back page. We haven't found where it's moved to yet, but what fun we are having tracking it down. Plus, we love the new Anthony Howard column in the place where "Fashion Notes" used to be. More power to your elbow!

Yours faithfully,
MRS ETHEL STOTHARD,
The Old Art Designerie,
Emerson St Othard, Dorset.

From Mr S. Glover

Sir, My wife and I are delighted by your new-look Times. Instead of having to throw away three sections, we now only have to throw away two.

Your humble and obedient servant,
S. GLOVER,
Chair of Media Studies, University of Neasden (formerly Doughty Street Polytechnic).

From Mrs Anna Gramme

Sir, My husband and I were thrilled by every aspect of your redesigned organ, which is a perfect model of everything a newspaper in the 21st century should be. We do, however, have one minor cavil. It is surely quite outrageous that there is no longer a white space next to the crossword, in which to work out our anagrams. We now have to buy The Guardian as well, to provide us with the blank paper which that otherwise pale imitation of The Times still thoughtfully provides for its readers. Come on, The Thunderer, give us back our white space!

Yours,
MRS ANNA GRAMME,
12, Across Road,
Co. Down.

From Mr D. Pratt

Sir, It is good to see The Times moving with the times.

DICK PRATT,
via e-mail, pratt@yahoo.com.

From Wng-Cdr. Cloudesley

Sir, As one of your older readers (I am 167 next birthday) I applaud your brave decision at long last to move the advertisements off the front page and to change your title to The Guardian. Newspaper of the year? More like the newspaper of the Millennium, in my humble opinion!

Yours faithfully,
WING-COMMANDER CLOUDESLEY,
Buzzcock, Windsock,
Beds.

"You don't give up anything for Lent and this is what happens!"

Nursery Times

FRIDAY MARCH 24 2000

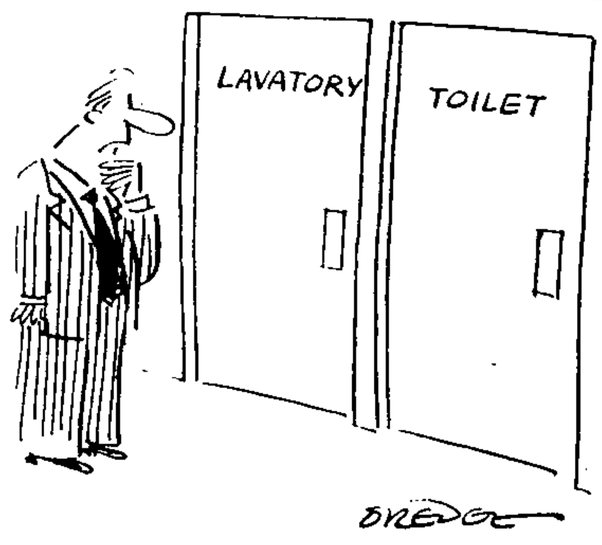
BRITAIN'S 100 YOUNGEST BORES

Who are they, the whizz-kid high-flyers who are toppling the older-established bores off their perch? They're young, they're dynamic, and they're incredibly boring.

Martha Lame-Duck, 21, who started lose-money.dot.con 6 months ago in her Stoke Poges bedroom, and is today worth an estimated £10.2 billion. Says Martha, "I suppose I am very boring, but it's not being boring that's important. It's the challenge and the excitement of being at the cutting edge of the new Millennium."

Julian Anorak, 17, who started caffe-latte.dot.con selling on-line coffee to mobile phone users from his parents' Worplesdon garage only three months ago, is now worth an estimated £179.5 billion. Says Julian: "OK, so I'm incredibly boring. But being boring's not what turns me on. I just happen to believe in cyber-latte, OK?"

Vikram Sixpak, 19, who launched poppa.dom.cot, Britain's first internet-based poppadom retailing operation, from the top of a No. 19 bus, and is today worth an estimated £1,821 billion. Says Vikram: "Being boring is a very small part of the pleasure I get from my company. The main thing is to be at the interface of vertically-integrated pappadum delivery and the growing needs of e-customers in a global economy." *(That's enough e-bores. Ed.)*



Market Goes Wild Over New Internet Flotation

by Our Fairy-tale Staff **Mother Lane Goose**

THERE were scenes of frenzied buying in the Stock Exchange today as shares in the new internet sensation emperorsnewclothes.com went on the market.

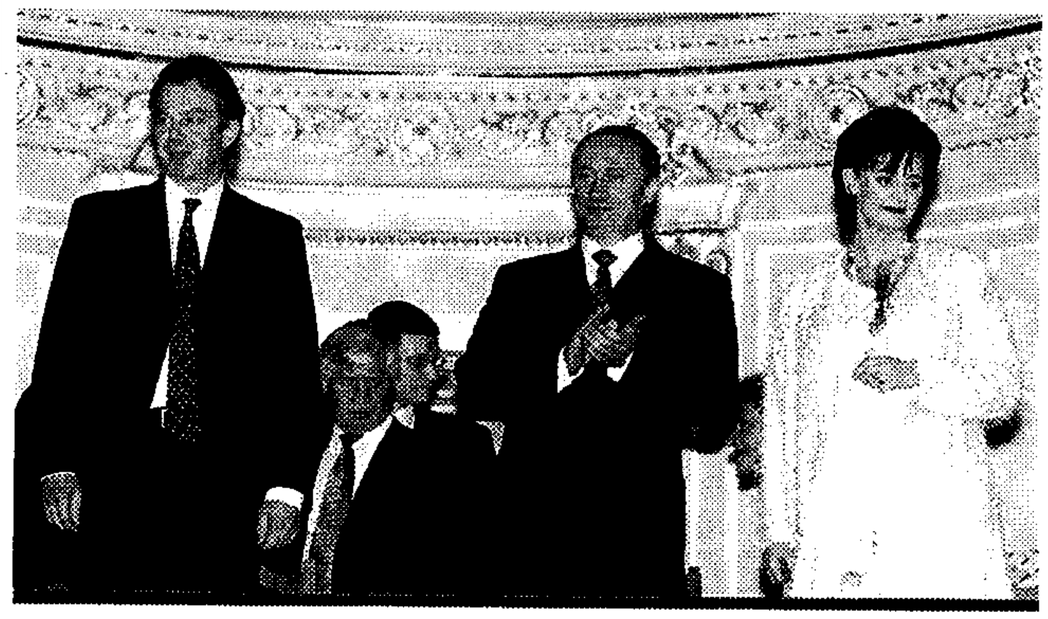
The company which provides an online retail quality garment service for members of the Imperial family was estimated to be worth a staggering 100 billion sovereigns.

However, a little boy analyst was worried that the company has so far provided very little in the way of visible results. "This is just naked greed. There's just nothing there."

But supporters are unworried.

Said a Mr Humpty Dumpty, "I've put all my savings into emperorsnew-clothes.com and I'm absolutely confident in their prospects. You certainly won't find me jumping off the top of a high wall when it all goes wrong."

NEW SHOCK REVELATIONS ABOUT R.A.S. PUTIN



by Our Russian Staff **Boris Notgodenov** (Editor)

A SHOCKING new dossier has come to light which reveals that the famous Russian politician R.A.S. Putin is not the cuddly figure he has hither to been painted in the West, but a tyrant, mass murderer and sinister member of a notorious spy ring.

The dossier also shows how Mr Putin cast a spell over the Blairina and her naïve spouse, His Imperial Highness the Blairovich, the Autocrat of All the Britains.

A letter which has only just been discovered in the Kremlin archives clearly shows the intimate relationship which sprang up between the Blairov family and the charismatic but sinister non-bearded Muscovite mesmerist:

Dear Mr. Putin,

The Emperor and I so much enjoyed our visit to Moscow. Our hours with you were some of the happiest we have enjoyed for a long time, away from the noisome rabble who fill the streets of London complaining about their lot.

We particularly enjoyed our evening at your wonderful opera-house, listening to that delightful new work The Destruction of Grozny *by the talented Mr Kalashnikov.*

The Emperor wishes me to express his regret that he inadvertently mentioned the subject of Chechnya during your meeting. He blames this entirely on the briefing he was given by the wretched officials of our Foreign Office and wishes you to know that they will all be executed.

We look forward to welcoming you on a visit to London, and showing you our marvellous new Dome.

Your admiring friend,
THE PRINCESS CHERINA

POETRY CORNER

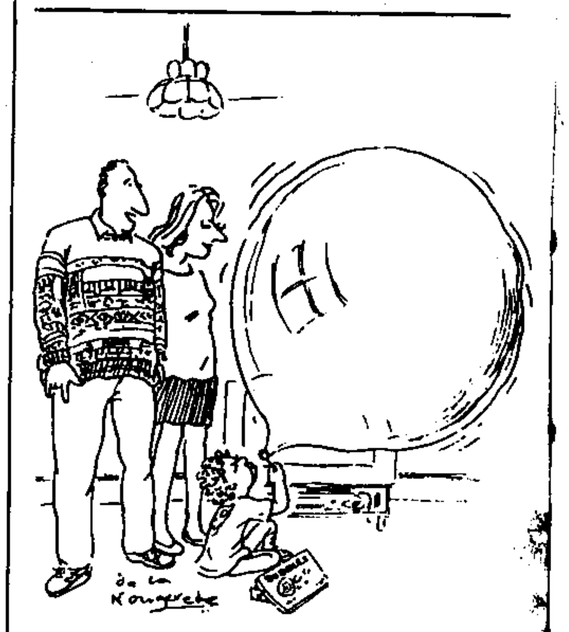
So. Farewell
Then
Accuracy.

I have made
Two errors in
My last two
Poems.

In the poem
About Gad Rausing, the
Man who invented
The milk carton
He appeared as
"God" Rausing.

And then
Ernest Lough, the
Boy soprano
Was spelt
"Luff".

P.J. Throbb (19½)



"Mark my words – he's going to be an IT entrepreneur!"

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Charles Gray, alias Blofeld

So. Farewell
Then
Charles Gray.

Alias
Blofeld.

With your cigarette
Holder and
Your white
Cat.

"So, Mr Bond.
We meet again."

That was your
Catchphrase.

"Goodbye
Mr Bond."

That was
Another.

And now
It is goodbye
To you,
Mr Gray.

E. James Bond (0017½)

A Taxi Driver writes

Every week a well-known cab driver is asked to write about an issue of topical importance. This week: **Al Einstein** (Cab No. Emc²) on the link between the Hippocampus and The Knowledge.

See that piece in the paper guv about how cabbies have got bigger brains than anyone else? Not surprising, guv, is it when you consider all them street names we 'ave to learn – millions and millions of 'em, little mewses, one-way streets, little rat-runs, I know 'em all. Westbourne Grove did you say, guv? I'll just pull in here an' look it up. I 'ad that Carol Vorderman in the back of the cab once. Very clever girl.

DAILY TELEGRAPH

Letters to the Editor

Mr. Mandelson's interview on Irish radio

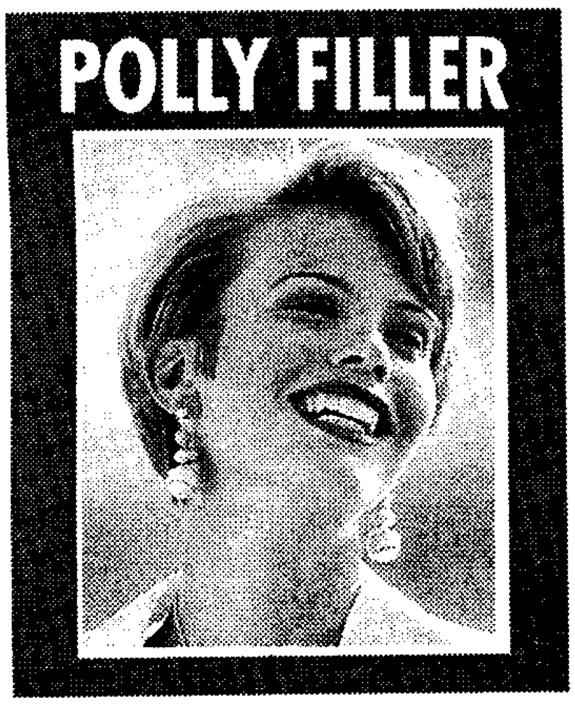
SIR — Millions of acting and former servicemen all over the world will have been outraged and appalled by Mr. Peter Tatchell's description of the Household Division as "chinless wonders". Mr. Mandelstam is too young and, dare one say it, too effeminate, to have served in any capacity in Her Majesty's armed forces. Furthermore, it is clear to me, and to all other unbiased observers, that he is a screaming nancy boy of the first order and unfit to hold office, even in what that great man President Mugabe of what is now Zimbabwe (in my day British Rumbabaland) so rightly described as Mr. Blair's "Cabinet of gays".

MAJ. GEN. SIR HORACE CHINDIT-WONDER
The Last Posthouse,
Aldershot, Hants

Mr Mandelson An Apology

The Household Division of the British Army would like to apologise for their remarks last week suggesting members of the Labour Government were "brainless wonders". Their description of people like Mr Mandelson "strutting around in silly suits drinking pink champagne at pointless ceremonies" was unfortunate.

They now accept that Mr Mandelson is not "a brainless wonder" but a very brave politician doing a difficult job sucking up to an Irish audience on an obscure radio show.



I DON'T want to sound hard-hearted but the next Romanian woman who pushes her grubby baby into my face on the Underground will get an earful from the famed Polly Filler tongue!

If there is one thing I cannot abide it is the spectacle of women using their children to try and make money.

As I explained to my toddler Charlie when he asked if he could give the poor lady his pocket money, "She is not a poor lady, Charlie, she is a cynical professional who is trying to exploit you." Charlie, having inherited his father's soppy genes, burst into tears which no amount of consoling by the nanny could stop.

His nose filled with snot and I thought he was going to have "an accident" right there on the train! He looked so funny that it was difficult not to laugh at him. I suppose he was a bit emotional because his guinea-pig had died and the useless Simon (briefly stirring himself from *Dwarf Darts from Melbourne* on *Sky Extreme 2*) had flushed it down the loo saying it was a burial at sea!

Charlie had wanted a full funeral in the garden and had written a rather embarrassing little poem which he wanted to put in the grave with the recently deceased "Fluffy". (His name *not* mine. I suggested, rather amusingly I thought, that the guinea-pig should be called "Euro Pig" instead! But the joke was somewhat wasted on Charlie.)

ANYWAY, there we were at Charing Cross with the tearful toddler bawling his eyes out with our new Chechnyan nanny blubbing along unhelpfully, all because of this selfish scrounger.

As I said to my fellow passengers on the tube, "If this so-called beggar woman really wanted some money, she could come and clean my toilet once a week."

Everyone seemed to agree with me and showed their support by getting out at the next stop and moving into another carriage whilst complaining loudly about "that ghastly woman with the child".

© Polly Filler.

"Who do these foreign scroungers think they are, coming over here and taking all our abuse..."

HOW I DISCOVERED TRUE PENITENCE

by Sir Jonathan of Aitken

Exclusive to the Sunday Times (Because No One Else Would Spend £150,000 On Such Garbage)

SINCE my imprisonment I have come to terms with my past. I have had to face up to the fact that I did wrong in the sight of God. The crime I committed was a minor slip which anyone could have made, and which in fact was not a crime at all. It was only because the media were jealous that I went to Eton and Oxford, and was very good-looking, and was very rich with lots of houses and beautiful girlfriends, that I went to gaol at all. But now I have paid the price for my sins. Not that they were sins. I was just unlucky and a Conservative at the wrong time. But I forgive all those who persecuted me, the bastards.

Next week: I Know Where You Live Rusbridger – And So Do My Mates From D Wing!

© World Copyright Sunday Crimes.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Nicholas Walter, President of the Secular Society and inveterate writer of letters to newspapers

So. Farewell then
Nicholas Walter.

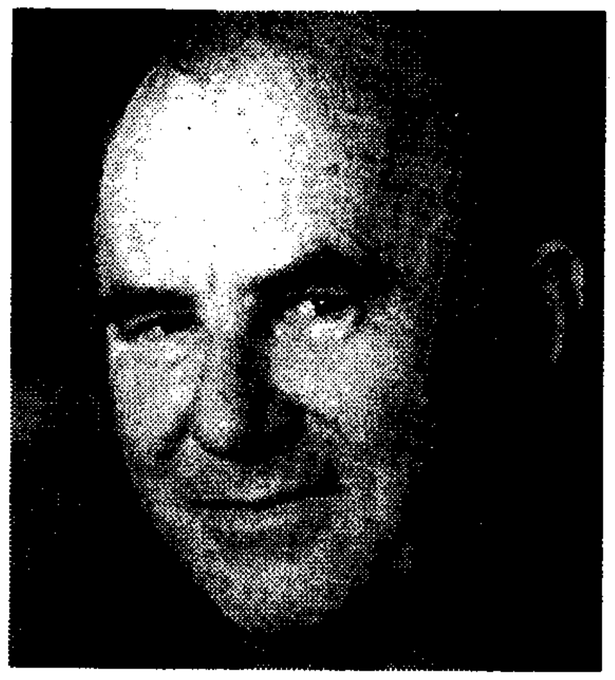
"Dear Sir"
That was your
Catchphrase.

"There is no God."
That was
Another.

And now
You will find out
If that is
True.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

DIARY



CLIVE JAMES

My time is set well fair to say farewell to TV. After twenty years of quality programme making, I have decided that saying "goodbye" is not only a "good buy", but the very best "bye-bye" money can buy. So "by Clive James" will now become "'bye, Clive James". If I have an itch, it is for a switch, and that switch is marked "off". Tears will be shed, but, as Goethe once said, no man can cry without shedding tears.

As personalities go, I was always much more a "person" than an "ality". While others were self-promoting, the only self I pro*moted* was the pro who said, "*moting* doing". In my self-deprecation, it was myself that I deprecated. It was not long before I was universally admired for my modesty. It was generally agreed, even by me, that I was a whole lot more interesting than the characters I interviewed. While lesser characters said, "Look at me," I would take the phrase, turn it on its head and spin it into stimulating paradox. "Me at look" I would shout, and the world would catch its breath.

If ten years is a long time, twenty years is a whole lot longer. Talking on television, it is on television that I have talked. My talk has been designed for others to hear – and hearing what I have to say has truly set them talking. Some have called television a Magic Lantern, and it is for its magic that this particular lantern will be remembered.

It is only by keeping myself in the foreground that I have been able to keep my subjects in the background. Looking back at some of my classic self-deprecating documentaries – *Clive James Meets Denise Van Outen in a Massage Parlour, Clive James's Postcard from Stingfellow's, Clive James Meets Baby Spice in his Swimming Trunks,* and the mould-breaking *Clive James Meets Clive James and Likes What He Sees* – I have learnt to marvel at my ability – at once able and marvellous – to subsume myself intellectually in my subject.

In my famous *Postcard from Russia*, I memorably spoke to the hard-working Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn. The interview took place in Siberia, in a makeshift sauna populated by dusky young Russian ladies whose birthday suits fitted them like gloves – gloves I wanted to place on my own hands, though I turned out to be all fingers and thumbs. And as I went all *gooey* in their *laps*, I asked Alexander about his own time in the *gooey-lag*. Was it ever this pleasant, I wondered?

Rarely have the skills employed by the interviewer been by the interviewer so skillfully employed. When Solzhenitsyn answered, I spoke carefully; listening hard, I hardly listened:

CJ *(voice over)*: Alexander Solzhenitsyn is a towering writer with a long beard whose stories are as tall as his memory is broad and his fingers are short. His writer's eyes – two, one on each side of his nose, both open at the same time, each viewing the world from their unique perspective – watch carefully, as if to say, "Is this really the famously self-deprecating Clive James?"

When the authorities told him to "Stay! Stay!" he said no, no, he wanted to archipela-go-go. So the first question I asked was as blunt as a sickle – and twice as sharp:

CJ: Alexander, when I was a young boy growing up in Australia, I'd sometimes drink a pint of Brown Wallaby Home Brew and then plant a sicky on my mum's begonia – and, let me tell you, she would persecute me for it! You, too, have faced persecution in your own country, Alexander – I guess they must have something against beards, eh?! – and you were denied access to a lot of Literature. You may even have missed my own classic *I Wanged My Donger Up a Kookaburra*. So what I wanted to know, Alexander, is this: through all those years of persecution, you remained loyal to an ideal – but, tell me, was that ideal Posh – or was it Ginger?

Alexander Solzhenitsyn: I – er – I – don't –

CJ: You're not going to tell me it was Baby! No? Scary? Blimey! Did I tell you, I once dated Naomi Campbell? Talk about intelligent! Her mind was as curvaceous as her breasts and her breasts were every bit as bouncy as her mind. Well, thanks for talking to us, Alexander, good luck with the old book – and now we "mos-go" to "Moscow" – where the spirit of Boris Pasternak haunts a rather special lap-dancing club...

The past is long, and top-quality TV is long-past. It may have looked simple, but its simplicity was highly complex, and it was a complex that was by no means inferior. Inferior decoration is not the same as interior decoration. The two words have many letters in common, but they mean something quite different. My programmes may have been interior, but they were never inferior. But sadly, the days are over when one could talk to Norman Mailer about Henry Miller on BBC television while being massaged by a young lady with bazonkers the size of War and Peace, Leo Tolstoy's magisterial masterpiece, which I myself have read in the original Russian nearly all the way through. The cult of celebrity has changed all that.

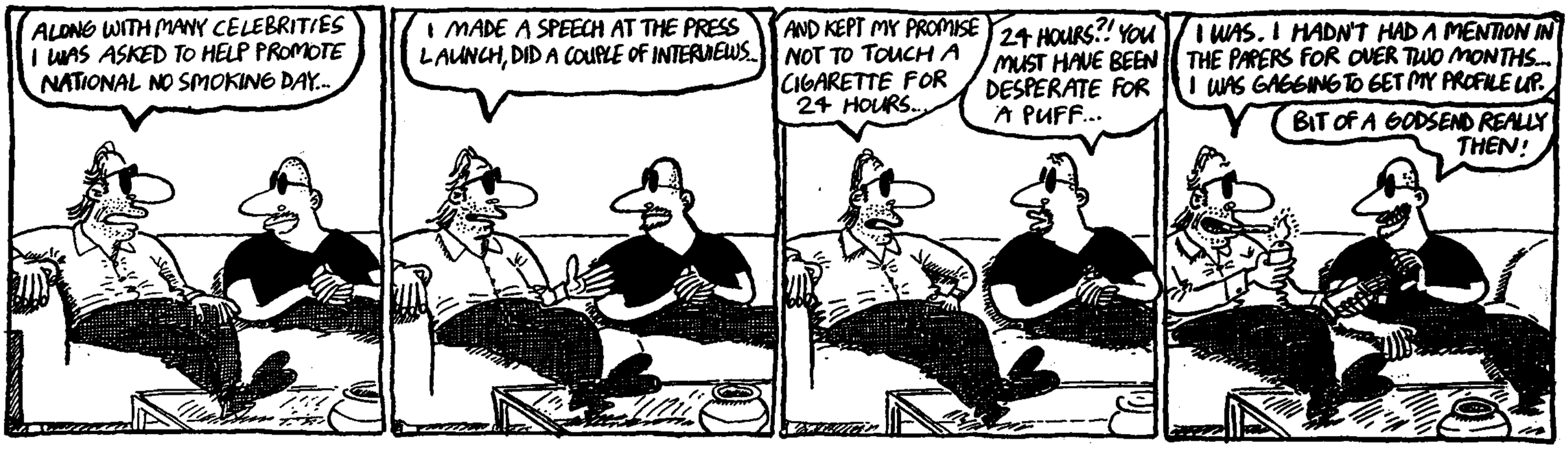
In dumbing down our culture, it is our culture that has been dumbed down. It was Proust who Searched for Lost Time, but he might have been Searching for Lost Radio Times too. A once-proud magazine is now a magazine that was proud, once. I doubt that television landmarks such as "Clive James and Denise Van Outen Say Let's Party in New Year '98 with Torvill and Dean" would ever get made these days. In the old days, one would study Oriental Languages to degree standard as a preparation for examining the sociological and cultural effect on naked Japanese men of swallowing live spiders while sitting in gunge. But in these pap-filled days, they're letting anyone do it, education be damned.

Cultural television has been shown the back door, and that door is marked "Back Door". The jewel is in the crown no more. The crown has drowned, causing the free world to frown. Around town, the crown is a clown, and its colour is now brown, proving that rust is no substitute for trust. But as the delighful (and, incidentally, highly intelligent) Britney Spears told me in my seminal *Clive Meets Britney Down Under*, a bust is a must for intellectual thrust.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


ALONG WITH MANY CELEBRITIES I WAS ASKED TO HELP PROMOTE NATIONAL NO SMOKING DAY...
I MADE A SPEECH AT THE PRESS LAUNCH, DID A COUPLE OF INTERVIEWS...
AND KEPT MY PROMISE NOT TO TOUCH A CIGARETTE FOR 24 HOURS...
24 HOURS?! YOU MUST HAVE BEEN DESPERATE FOR A PUFF...
I WAS. I HADN'T HAD A MENTION IN THE PAPERS FOR OVER TWO MONTHS... I WAS GAGGING TO GET MY PROFILE UP.
BIT OF A GODSEND REALLY THEN!

Literary Review

Film Duffs

Monster: Living Off The Big Screen
John Gregory Dunne
(Pan, £5.99)

My Movie Business
John Irving
(Bloomsbury, £12.99)

WHILE Essex girl jokes caused many Chingford women to temper their dress and behaviour — and America had to devise political correctness to put an end to gags about dumb Polacks — one legendary jest seems to have had no effect at all. It's the one about the Hollywood actress who was so stupid that she slept with a writer to advance her career.

Not only is every semi-bright teenager in the west currently writing a screenplay, but any published novelist — no matter how serious — is happy to abandon their next book in order to have a go at a script. It was surreal in the aftermath of Stanley Kubrick's death to discover just how many obscure London prose stylists — Candia McWilliam and Michelle Roberts among them — had been secretly trying to tap out a blockbuster for Stanley. And now — amazingly seeming to vindicate the actress in the joke — there is a whole genre of books which feature the phallic triumphalism of screenwriters: how big I am in Hollywood!

This all started with *Eyes Wide Open*, the work in which Frederic Raphael, soon after Stanley Kubrick's death, dashed to the word processor to create an account of how his massive Oxbridge classical intelligence had saved the hick director from social and artistic humiliation during the writing of Kubrick's final movie, *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Now John Gregory Dunne — a fancy-dan Manhattan journalist and novelist — has written *Monster*, an account of the unlikely eight years he and his even more upmarket wife Joan Didion spent writing 28 drafts of the Redford/Pfeiffer weepie *Up Close And Personal*. And John Irving — pugilistic wannabe-Dickensian of American letters, author of popular whoppers including *The World According To Garp* — has typed up *My Movie Business*, an account of his 15 years writing scripts of his novel *The Cider House Rules* for four different directors.

What's odd about these books is that they were inspired by lucrative previous publications but omit the elements which made those volumes so successful. The first tears-at-the-keyboard books — William Goldman's *Adventures In The Screen Trade* and Rob Long's *Conversations With My Agent* — were mordantly self-deprecating accounts of the insignificance of the screenwriter. Their "arc" — as screenwriters call it — was how the writers lost out. This — in any Literature v Cinema bout — is the result on which the readers bet.

Dunne and Irving's books begin promisingly with the expected scenes of sinister and philistine producers, abusive studio heads and cavalier management — the key elements in any Hollywood memoir are the astonishing quantities of time and money it takes to get a project going — but then (like the Raphael) take a strange and entertainment-draining twist.

Both Irving and Dunne/Didion develop close working relationships with a director. On *Up Close And Personal*, things get so cosy that the director (Jon Avnet) talks to the writers every day during shooting (an unheard-of courtesy in Hollywood) and seeks their advice on the tiniest details. Irving develops such mutual respect with his director (Lasse Hallstrom) that the novelist even comes to play a small acting role in the movie. He (like Dunne/Didion) is consulted over every cut and rewrite.

Where Goldman and Long's memoirs gloried in being lucratively screwed, *Monster* and *My Movie Business* both solemnly offer a new model for the writer in Hollywood. But there is one problem — both *The Cider House Rules* and *Up Close And Personal* are mediocre films. So, as it happens, was *Eyes Wide Shut*. The moral is simple: movies should be made by film-makers. The victories for literature described in these books were a defeat for movie-goers.

Even more disturbing for novelists with dreams of winning an Oscar is the fact that film-makers now seem determined to muscle in on printed fiction. Recently five American directors or producers — Wes Craven, Peter Farrelly, Harmony Khorine, Ethan Coen and Oliver Stone — have published novels or stories.

Just as Irving, Dunne and Raphael are suggesting that writers have finally raised themselves a little higher on the Hollywood seesaw, the directors start piling literary weight on their side. Did you hear about the screenwriter who was so stupid they thought the director took them seriously?

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS

The Consolations of Philosophy Alain de Botton

I'VE BEEN reading some really interesting books about a man called Epicurus. Apparently we shouldn't always understand the desire for riches as the simple hunger for a luxurious life. In fact love, respect and modest prosperity are much better than enormous pots of money.

In pursuit of this Epicurus says that we should all make a list of the steps to contentment that will make us happy. I thought this was a jolly good idea.

Alain de Botton's steps to contentment

A moderately well-off parent, perhaps an investment banker or even a financier — one isn't fussy — to sponsor one's early years.

A modestly agreeable residence in some unassuming part of London such as Mayfair or Belgravia.

A publisher prepared to bring out one's musings on Proust, Kant, Hegel, etc.

A small number of well-connected friends to supply articles with titles such as "Alain de Botton — the thinking woman's muffin" to newspaper cultural sections.

Some nice TV producer to transfer one's thoughts to a modestly-framed television series for — I don't know — possibly Channel Four.

This seems to be the sort of thing that Epicurus had in mind.

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ LORD Archer of Victoria Station is clearly losing confidence in the saleability of his turgid books.

His last deal with HarperCollins was an "all you can eat" contract, in which Archole waived his royalties in exchange for a shedload of cash upfront — in this case $14m over three books. Now his contract is up for renewal, and with Macmillan and HarpicCollins believed to be the front-runners, the *Bookseller* reports that he is going for another huge flat fee.

All of this is in marked contrast to his days with Hodder & Stoughton, when he was so sure of cleaning up on his royalties that he only ever accepted a nominal £1 advance, a fact of which he always made great publicity capital. It is not quite clear why Harpic is so keen to retain his services — when Jane "Kinky" Friedman arrived from New York to take the helm after Eddie "McBastard" Bell's departure, her first question was

"You've been stuck on that internet all night, come down and watch the telly"

"does this Archer guy really sell?" The mathematical evidence, even after being run through the Byzantine creative accounting system that Harpic uses for working out author earnings, was not entirely convincing.

■ **DEPENDING on which version of the current rumour you hear, HarpicCollins is either *ready to* poach Victoria Barnsley of Fourth Estate to replace McBastard or about to buy Barnsley's company.**

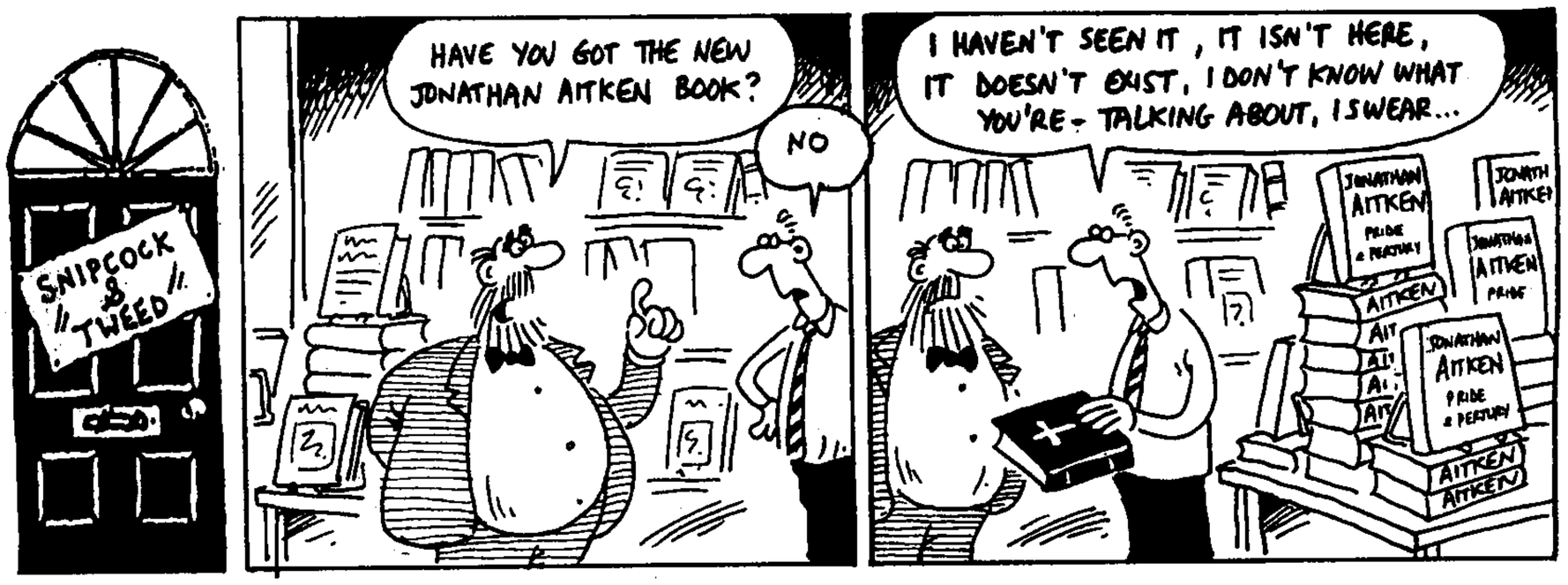
If the latter is the case, what will this mean for the hugely critical biography of Rupert Murdoch that Fourth Estate's resident mischief-makers Christopher Potter and Clive Priddle have commissioned from rabid Manchester United fan Michael Crick?

■ *THE capricious Old Etonian Anthony "Fatty" Cheetham has decided that "Any Old" Ion Trewin is back in favour again. The turnaround came as a surprise to staff who were expecting blood on the carpets at Orion House.*

Many at the company are now hoping Fatty will also rethink his position on the departure of Susan Lamb, his loud but effective paperback chief. He accepted her resignation in January and she is currently serving a year's notice.

With all of these upheavals, it's a good job that Fatty has had Leo Cooper's bleatings in the Torygraph's *Peterbore column to cheer him up. Cooper complained that Fatty had eased himself and Sir John Keegan out as advisers to the Cassell military list. How could Cheetham do this, wondered Cooper, when he and Jolly Soopah had gone to all the effort of attending the publisher's most recent wedding? In fact Keegan's feet are still well and truly under the table at Cassell, but the incident has left the great strategist fuming, not least because no one on Peterbore thought to check the story with him. This would not have been the hardest task in the world, as he is defence editor of the, er,* Telegraph.

'Bookworm'


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
HAVE YOU GOT THE NEW JONATHAN AITKEN BOOK?
NO
I HAVEN'T SEEN IT, IT ISN'T HERE, IT DOESN'T EXIST, I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT, I SWEAR...
JONATHAN AITKEN
PRIDE & PERJURY
AITKEN

IN THE BACK

DISHONEST WORKMAN

CALVIN TUCKER was intrigued by the story in the last *Eye* about Joy Hendricks, a black policewoman in north London, and her encounter with her colleague Sgt Mark Workman.

Workman alleged in court that WPC Hendricks had attacked him for no apparent reason at Islington police station. His evidence did not convince the magistrate, who said she was troubled by it and acquitted Joy Hendricks on all charges. The name Mark Workman reminded Calvin Tucker of his arrest outside Rupert Murdoch's News International plant at Wapping in June 1986.

Mr Tucker, who was then working for the TUC, went to Wapping one Saturday evening to observe the weekly struggle between police and pickets from Murdoch's striking workforce. Sitting down to light a cigarette on a traffic island, he was surprised to be arrested by two police officers, including Mark Workman, then a constable. The officers said they'd seen him set light to a billboard outside the plant.

Though he and witnesses to his arrest protested that he had nothing to do with the fire, Mr Tucker was pushed to the ground, handcuffed and carted off to a police station where he was charged with arson and held overnight. When he appeared in the dock at Southwark crown court six months later, the two

Calvin Tucker

police officers, including Workman, gave evidence against him.

So impressed was Judge Lowe with their stories that he dismissed the case before it went to the jury. A free man, Calvin Tucker started a long action against the Metropolitan police for assault, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution.

The first hearing was in July 1994. The police officers told their stories again, but the hopelessness of their evidence was further exposed when a Mr High, an administrative officer at the inner London crown court, testified that he had seen the entire incident of the burning of the billboard. He said that the four men who set light to it had run away long before the police arrived and that Calvin Tucker had nothing to do with the incident from start to finish.

After a crass summing up, Judge Willis asked the jury if they thought the police had honestly suspected Tucker of the crime. When they answered in the affirmative, the judge found against Mr Tucker, who promptly appealed. The case went to the court of appeal on 17 November 1995.

The three judges (Simon Brown, Auld and Macpherson) unanimously concluded that the judge had been wrong to put the question about "honest suspicion" to the jury. Mr Justice Macpherson (who much later chaired the Stephen Lawrence inquiry) said the case involved two entirely different stories, one from Workman and his colleague, the other from Mr Tucker. He concluded: "There was the starkest of issues between the parties as to whether the plaintiff had anything to do with the billboard... One side was clearly giving an untruthful account."

The evidence proved beyond doubt that the untruthful account had come from the police officers. Lord Justice Simon Brown put the point even more bluntly. Both officers, he said, had "fabricated an account of actually seeing Mr Tucker commit the crime in order to provide the proof that was otherwise lacking." The officers, in short, had invented their evidence and the judge's ruling had to be reversed.

Mr Tucker's claims were upheld and back went the case to Judge Crush for assessment of damages. In May 1996, the judge delivered a stinging rebuke not just to "the disgraceful conduct of these lying police officers" but also to the Metropolitan police commissioner Paul Condon for taking no disciplinary action against them. The commissioner, said the judge, had appeared "completely indifferent to the view of the court of appeal that the officers are lying". He awarded Calvin Tucker £30,000 damages.

When Mr Tucker read in the newspapers about Joy Hendricks' case last summer, he went down to the magistrates court at Horseferry Road. He thought that she and her lawyers might be interested to hear that the officer who was charging her with a serious assault had previously been exposed at the court of appeal as a fabricator of evidence.

The Hendricks case had just finished and all the parties had left. Mr Tucker was told what happened by a reporter for the *Sun* newspaper, who gave him the name of Joy Hendricks' lawyers, Russell Jones and Walker. He rang the solicitors and left his name. The lawyers never contacted him. He also told the *Sun* reporter about Workman's involvement in his case. The reporter wrote a story though nothing was published in the *Sun*.

FACT TO REMEMBER: The *Sun* is published at Wapping.

Prison kills...

BRETT HAY, an insulin-dependent diabetic, died from an overload of sugar in his blood in Lincoln prison three days after he was jailed for minor theft. But four years on his wife and young children are still trying to find out exactly how and why the tragedy occurred.

They know only that hours before his death the 31-year-old was in the jail's hospital wing where he was given a sugary drink which would have made his condition worse not better.

An inquest verdict of natural causes was quashed over a year ago by two high court judges who found a catalogue of failure on the part of the Lincoln coroner Roger Atkinson (see *Eye* 980). So far, however, the second Lincoln coroner assigned to the case, Neil Sharpley, has refused to set a date for another inquest to answer the many questions raised about Mr Hay's treatment and care in jail.

What is not in dispute is that during Mr Hay's third night in prison he was taken ill — vomiting, having difficulty breathing and suffering chest and stomach pains, which are symptoms of too much blood sugar. He was transferred to the hospital wing and his blood tested. The reading, over which there are now doubts, was apparently high but not alarmingly so. Mr Hay was checked every 15 minutes and a doctor's advice sought, although it seems he was never actually examined by a doctor. At some stage he was given the glucose drink to replace lost fluids. He later died of ketoacidosis, a condition triggered by too much blood sugar.

The original inquest jury decided he had died of natural causes. But the high court took the very unusual step of quashing that verdict after deciding that coroner Atkinson had:

- wrongly failed to call two prisoner witnesses;
- wrongly stopped the family lawyers from questioning doctors and prison staff;
- wrongly excluded police evidence;
- wrongly advised the jury that accidental death was not an option open to them.

The judges said it was quite possible that a wrong blood sugar reading, coupled with the administration of the drink, "could have led a properly directed jury" to conclude that an accident or combination of accidents was a substantial cause of death.

When judges make such an extraordinary claim, you might think justice demands that a second inquiry take place as soon as possible while memories are fresh and witnesses available. But despite repeated protests from the family, Mr Sharpley has not yet set a date for the second inquest saying only that theirs "was not the only substantial case awaiting listing in Lincoln".

The family, already failed by the inquest system, are now having to complain about the conduct of a second coroner even before he hears any evidence. A letter of complaint has gone to home office minister Paul Boateng.

● **STUART John Green, 19, a known suicide risk, has just become the 16th person to kill himself in Britain's jails this year. And last week London coroner Dr Stephen Chan, deeply disturbed at the apparent failure of those charged with caring for vulnerable prisoners, blamed "blunders, cock-ups and incompetence" for the suicide of another mentally ill prisoner in Pentonville last year.**

Alfonso Coley, 43, was transferred to the jail after he had tried to hang himself in the Mount Prison in Hemel Hempstead and it was decided the Mount could not care for him properly. But because of a "communications fiasco" between the two jails, Mr Coley was branded a trouble–maker at Pentonville rather than a potential suicide. Later that night he hanged himself with a noose made from his bed-sheet.

After an inquest jury returned a verdict of misadventure and neglect, Dr Chan said he would be writing to the chief inspector of prisons: "It is incumbent upon those who have custody of others — particularly vulnerable inmates in their charge — to act fully to provide reasonable and appropriate care to these people."

With suicides continuing at a record rate of eight a month over the last year, Deborah Coles, director of Inquest, the organisation that monitors deaths in custody, is not optimistic. "In a political climate where the emphasis is on punishment and impoverished prison regimes, neglect and indifference to prisoners' distress has become a feature of prison life."

People on the make (Shurely 'move'? Ed)

STEPHEN Littlechild, former government regulator of the privatised electricity industry, has a new job.

Stephen Littlechild

He is to be a director of the consultancy firm LECG where he will "advise utilities and their regulators in the UK and internationally on designing, operating within and minimising the extent of utility regulation".

As perceptive *Eye* readers will recall, this seems to be the same sort of job he did when he was regulator. For Professor Littlechild's background in the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies and his deep faith in private enterprise see *Eyes* 737 and 747; and for his not altogether heroic determination to refer the new electricity monopoly to the monopolies and mergers commission, see *Eyes* 821, 833 and 836.

● **JULIA LOMAS has had a long career in public service law — she has been borough solicitor at the London borough of Haringey and until recently was chief executive of the Public Trust Office (PTO) which handles the legal affairs of the mentally incapacitated.**

The affairs of the PTO have recently been investigated by an independent review from the lord chancellor's office, and there is much talk that the PTO and all its work will be privatised. The time had come obviously for Ms Lomas to make the time-honoured move from public to private enterprise. She is joining the London office of ambitious solicitors Irwin Mitchell as a consultant with partner status in the firm's court of protection unit which looks after the interests of... the mentally incapacitated.

DENNIS MENACE

ANOTHER driver of a Dennis Dart bus has been acquitted of dangerous driving.

Eye readers will recall the shocking story of the deaths in December 1998 of Janine Harrison, 18, and Nicola Anderson, 26, in Sunderland bus station. A Dennis Dart Stagecoach bus had suddenly surged forward from a stationary position, smashing into the two young women who were sitting chatting on a bench. The two women died instantly and Mrs Anderson's baby daughter was seriously injured.

The driver of the bus, Gordon Clifford, who had 25 years' experience, was immediately suspended by Stagecoach. This month he came up at Newcastle crown court charged with causing death by dangerous driving. After long and *tortuous* legal argument, Judge David Hodson refused to allow the case to go to the jury on the grounds that there was no evidence of the intention necessary to convict.

Dennis rushed out a press statement from its Falkirk headquarters. "It is important to note," said the statement, "that suggestions of defect in the bus were dismissed by the judge".

That is not an accurate summary of the judge's summing up, which said only that there was no evidence of a defect which might lead to a "sudden and total loss of control". He specifically did not pass judgment on the question of mechanical defect, and took the case away from the jury who could not decide it either.

The judge said there was some evidence the driver had pressed the accelerator instead of the brake. This evidence was emphasised by Bill Bryson, the engineering consultant who gave evidence for the prosecution and happens to be a director of Dennis. The judge commented: "I say nothing about the wisdom of the crown relying on Mr Bryson as an expert witness where in the light of possible civil litigation, he might possibly be thought to have the interests of Dennis in mind."

On the very day driver Clifford was freed (10 March), another Dennis Dart bus suddenly shot forward from a stationary position outside the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The bus careered into a number of parked cars trapping pedestrians on the way. The *Birmingham Evening Mail*, without naming the make of bus, reported on its front page that one of the five people hurt was "very ill" in Heartlands Hospital.

After the crash: Sunderland bus station

The succession of accidents from sudden surges of Dennis buses has even started to worry the government. On 23 August last, a report on "alleged unintended acceleration" in public service vehicles was sent to the department of transport by the vehicle inspectorate. Keith Hill, transport minister, told the House of Commons just before Christmas that his department had "subsequently asked the vehicle inspectorate "to provide additional information to widen the scope of the informal investigations." A department spokesman tells the *Eye* this further report has not yet been submitted but is expected shortly.

Mr Hill was answering a question from Ernie Ross, MP for Dundee West, who was troubled by trade union reports of other bizarre incidents involving Dennis Dart buses in Dundee and Aberdeen.

The theory that these accidents are all the fault of drivers has been a consistent theme from Dennis for some years. It did not convince jury members at Aylesbury crown court in April 1996, when they unanimously acquitted Ali Akbar, a bus driver of 20 years' experience, of dangerous driving. Mr Akbar's bus had crashed into a wall after surging forward in a bus station. His lawyer read out records of 17 similar incidents recorded by the Transport and General Workers' union. As at Newcastle this month, these incidents were all explained by the company in terms of the driver accidentally slamming his foot on the wrong pedal.

Drivers have always had some difficulty refuting such allegations since there are rarely any witnesses about what they do with their feet while driving. In one case, however, recorded in *Eye* 996, a woman was being trained as a driver when her Dennis Dart bus surged forward. The trainer, who was sitting next to her, noticed that during the entire surge the driver's foot was clamped firmly to the brake.

The Price (Waterhouse) is Right

ANOTHER first for PriceWaterhouse Coopers (PWC), the distinguished accountancy firm picked by the House of Lords as the best possible headhunter for the appointments commission for new peers.

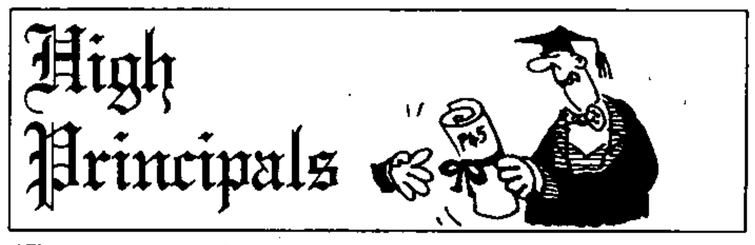
PWC has come top of two new lists emerging from an investigation carried out by Brand Finance plc of auditors of the top British companies listed on the stock exchange. The survey set out to find out how many of the auditors of such companies supplemented their audit fees with non-audit fees for consultancies and other work.

Brand takes the old-fashioned view that auditors should not take other work from companies whose accounts they audit, in case the rich pickings on other work can be seen to influence the rigour of the audits.

The results of the survey show that all the top five accountancy firms got more from their clients in other work than from audit fees. The league table that emerged looked like this:

	Audit fees	Non-audit fees from same clients
PWC	£122.8m	£244.8m
KPMG	£87.5m	£123.1m
Ernst & Young	£47.1m	£61.7m
Arthur Andersen	£19.6m	£24.3m
Deloitte & Touche	£18.9m	£23.7m

The other smaller accountancy firms were less lucky. They got paid £8.7m in audit fees and only £7.7m in other fees. "The time would appear ripe," says Brand Media, "for a wide-ranging review of auditor conflicts of interest."



The Dame game

THE newsletter of New College Nottingham (NCN) has come to the rescue of staff who have been in a quandary over how to address their principal since she was made a dame in the new year's honours list for services to further education.

"I am sure that you have all heard by now of the great honour bestowed on our principal in the millennium honours list," creeps the newsletter's author. "Many of you have asked what the appropriate form of address should be — on formal, written communication her title is Dame Patricia Morgan-Webb DBE, when formally addressing Pat in speeches the correct term is Dame Patricia Morgan-Webb, however, for most internal communication and addresses Pat Morgan-Webb will suffice."

As if Dame Morgan-Webb has not had enough honours bestowed on her already, the *Times Educational Supplement* on 4 February gave her odds of 20:1 to become chair of the new Learning and Skills Council.

All contaminated on the Weston front

ICI's chemical plant at Runcorn should be top of the Environment Agency's hit list when the long awaited contaminated land regulations come into force next month.

The huge chemical complex comes second in the Friends of the Earth dirty league for releasing huge quantities of carcinogens into the air. And now toxins — dumped into a nearby quarry many years ago by ICI's predecessors — have seeped into the ground and are now polluting the nearby village of Weston.

So far 21 families have been forced to move after the gas, HCBD, was found to have surfaced into their homes. HCBD is a nasty by-product in the manufacture of organochlorine compounds, which concentrates in the kidneys and which, in animal tests, has been linked to kidney and liver disease and arrested foetal development. Further drilling and testing by ICI, which is offering to buy the properties in the blighted area of the village, continues.

The threat of "significant harm" should, one would have thought, automatically give the area special site status under the new provisions, which would bring it under the supervision of the Environment Agency. But consultant geologists acting for Weston residents say the EA seems reluctant to use their new powers, instead leaving ICI in control of monitoring and dealing with the problem, supervised only by the local authority.

Last week an EA spokesman confirmed that was the case. He said the agency was satisfied that underlying aquifers were not affected and the site did not therefore meet the criteria for listing. But Mike Matthews, of Peak Associates, the consultancy offering expert geological advice, is adamant that water is affected. "Either the EA is just plain wrong or it is operating under a different set of draft guidelines to the ones we have," he said.

In fairness to ICI, contamination was only discovered because of its voluntary Pathway Initiative to examine the site and its offer to buy up blighted homes has been swift and fair. But cynics suggest the company was only heading off the inevitable in the face of the new legislation which was introduced to clean up the UK's huge toxic dumping legacy. There is suspicion in the village that buying up and bulldozing blighted homes to remove risk to humans and animals might help the company escape special listing and prove cheaper than a thorough clean up to remove any threat of harm.

PS: If ICI's bombshell wasn't enough for the 1,000 villagers of Weston, last week the nearby European Vinyl Corporation's (EVC) Rock Savage plant spewed two tonnes of hydrogen chloride into the air above their homes. Hydrogen chloride can damage the eyes, skin and mucous membranes, in severe cases causing burns and ulceration of the skin and respiratory tracts. Seven villagers went to hospital with minor eye and throat irritation. One was detained for observation.

Sunset of York?

THIS column offers an unconditional and grovelling apology to York College.

Two issues ago (996) we reported that following the merger with the local Sixth Form College, York College was planning 42 redundancies. This figure, confirmed to the *Eye* by the college, is entirely wrong — and grossly underestimates the grim prospects for the staff.

A letter from college human resources manager Ian Schofield to trade union reps on 7 February (almost exactly the time the college told us about the 42 redundancies) announces a proposal for 94 redundancies. At the same time the college will be creating new jobs for 33 "learning assistants", who will be paid rather less than the sacked staff they replace.

In the City

ANALYST, investor, journalist… alchemist. Luke Johnson sometimes appears to be the City's equivalent of Renaissance man. His share purchases and sales are watched closely. So too are the words of wisdom in his *Sunday Telegraph* column. His name alone appears able to turn base shells into gold.

Sadly he has been somewhat unfairly embarrassed of late by the mysterious affection shown for his companies by the *Mirror*'s disgraced City Slickers — as detailed in Hackwatch. It is all so puzzling as chief share spiv Anil Bhoyrul was fired by Johnson in 1997 after he moved into the sinking Tom Rubython version of *Sunday Business*.

But it is not just the boundless appetite of the *Mirror* spivs for restaurant group Belgo and other Johnson shares or his ability to encourage investors via the *Sunday Telegraph* which has aroused concerns in the City. It is the impact Johnson and a little group of Luke-minded market movers and shakers have had on the overheated dotcom and other bubble stocks.

Johnson friends, associates and Luke-alikes such as Hugh Osmond of Punch Taverns; Nigel Wray of Knutsford and much more besides; former HSBC investment banker turned financier Keith Harris; and Damien (son of John) Aspinall plus several others pop up in just too many of the bubble stocks as directors, investors or promoters.

Once they are in, the mob follows, propelled by the relentless publicity from cheerleaders on the financial pages who see Johnson and friends as the new wealth creators. They are — but for themselves first.

But then with their backgrounds Johnson and Wray (who started out with financial newsletters), like another favourite, ex-analyst Chris Akers, are media savvy with no shortage of friends and admirers among City hacks for whom they can be valuable sources of tips. But as the old saying goes, where there's a tip there's a tap — especially if the informant is a shareholder in the company being tipped.

Older City hands see disturbing parallels with the Jim Slater/Slater Walker bubble of the late sixties and early seventies whereby merely the magic whisper "Jim's in" saw investors rushing to follow, often enabling Jim to exit. The fact that Jim was out when the world thought he was in only emerged later.

Another uncanny coincidence is that before he became infamous Jim Slater too had a share tip column and in the *Sunday Telegraph* under the pseudonym "Capitalist". This he used to puff shares in which he held undisclosed stakes. Slater too was a friend and valuable informant of many financial hacks, including the influential City editors of the *Sunday Telegraph* (naturally) and the *Daily Mail*.

Interestingly in his 19 March column Johnson points to the one or more year "lock-in" restrictions that can prevent promoters cashing in when shares soar. But that does not always apply — especially if you are not classed as an insider but merely an investor.

In some cases it may of course be coincidental that City "rainmakers" who know each other invest in each other's or the same companies. In other cases it is clearly by design. But those concerned at greed-powered private investors' preparedness to pile into the latest "hot" stock express concern about what information is shared among this magic circle of players, some of whom meet regularly at the monthly gatherings of the Johnson-founded Mandrake Club or its younger rival First Tuesday.

Of course it is all completely innocent and in keeping with City rules about inside information. But many of those who have been all too happy to follow the magic circle ignore at their peril the stark fact that their heroes will always be in at the ground floor whereas they may be joining at the penthouse level.

And as Luke Johnson himself warned (*Daily Mail*, 28 January) — after unloading shares in Blakes Clothing which went from pennies to more than 200p on dotcom plans by him and Osmond: "Shares are for selling. There's a lot of speculation and fingers will be burned." And he would know.

FORMER treasury minister Geoffrey Robinson may indeed have little to fear from the Serious Farce Office probe into the collapse of TransTec — he was either a non-executive or ex-director when the crucial $18m debt to Ford was hidden — but it is less clear what the financial ramifications of the crash may be both for him and the Orion Trust.

This is especially so as it now appears that both his and the offshore family trust's now worthless shares were all held by an HSBC nominee company at the time of the collapse. These had previously been in the name of the London branch of Credit Suisse.

Bank nominee companies usually hold shares in their names when they have lent against the shares or hold them as security for some other loan.

Orion paid some £10m to purchase its TransTec stake. Robinson's personal holding was almost entirely the product of his deal with Robert Maxwell whereby shares in Transfer Technology that cost him around £200,000 became worth £6m when the business was injected into what became TransTec in 1991.

Midland Bank, now HSBC, has always been a supportive banker to Robinson. It was the biggest lender to TransTec and has bankrolled Coventry City.

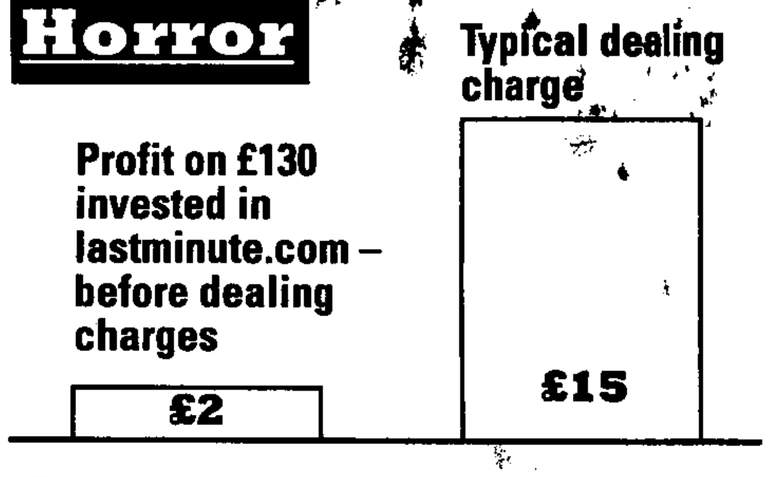
At one time in 1998 the Robinson/Orion stake in TransTec was worth around £35m. The question now is what if any loans did HSBC make against that shareholding after it was switched from Credit Suisse? Given that the shares are worthless this could mean Robinson needing to find an alternative means of repayment.

A HIGH court claim over a $10m derivatives loss suffered by Israeli investors may prove embarrassing for City regulators and banking giant HSBC.

The claim has been made by Bahamian company Provincial Trading against Zurich Investments, a Gibraltar company operating from offices in north London.

Zurich was dealing in exotic derivatives marketed by offshore branches of HSBC based on bonds issued from emerging markets in South America such as Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela. These were known as "Fidelio" notes. HSBC and its Midland Bank subsidiaries were the market for the Fidelio notes linked to the bonds. The bank also held the underlying bonds. The carrot was the higher interest offered on the notes than by the bonds. The stick was that any sharp fall in the bonds could trigger a repayment demand on the notes at a loss to the noteholder.

Stock Horror



According to Provincial, Zurich carried out deals in the Fidelio notes without authorisation from the Financial Services Authority to carry on investment business. Provincial claims it did this after persuading the FSA's predecessor, the Securities & Investments Board, in 1996 that it was dealing solely for its own account.

Having obtained this SIB ruling Zurich subsequently began dealing substantially for the investors behind Provincial Trading who bought some $24m of the Fidelio notes during 1997 and 1998. It did this with the help of "margin" loans provided by the Swiss Banque Cantonale Vaudoise which had a relationship with Zurich. Provincial claims HSBC either did not know and/or mention that Zurich was unauthorised to deal for third parties. Nor was the SIB/FSA informed. But then there were big commissions to be made from the business and Zurich had become a valued customer for the Fidelio notes.

All was fine until the bond market crash of August 1998. The price of Fidelio notes collapsed. This resulted in HSBC exercising its right to buy back the notes at a price it dictated — a possibility of which Provincial claims it was unaware. The price is said to have been half that of the underlying bonds. But that's derivatives for you!

When Provincial raised its $10m loss with the FSA last year, the City regulator confirmed Zurich was not authorised to carry out investment business and promptly took proceedings against the London brokers. These were quietly settled last year by Zurich agreeing not to sin again without admitting any wrongdoing. The FSA appears to have accepted that there had been an unfortunate misunderstanding of the regulations.

Last July Provincial launched a high court claim against Zurich seeking to recover its losses. Zurich and its director Robert Neis deny the claims and have maintained they did not need authorisation and anyway the action should not be heard in London but Israel or Gibraltar. This latter point has now been rejected and a trial is set for later this year.

That is likely to raise questions about how Zurich was able to operate for two years without authorisation and also about the Fidelio note market created by HSBC which may have proved profitable to the bank but highly expensive to investors other than Provincial Trading.

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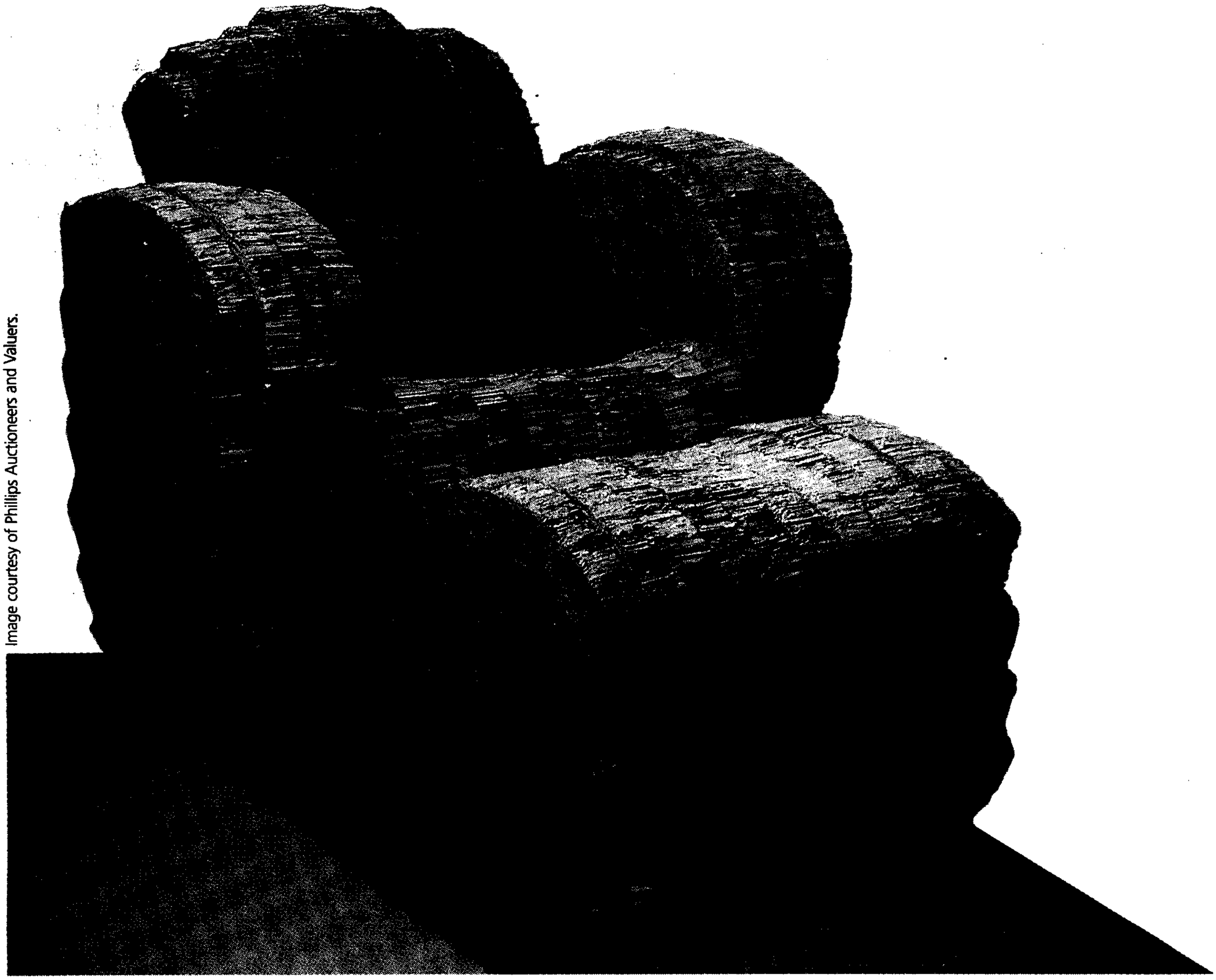

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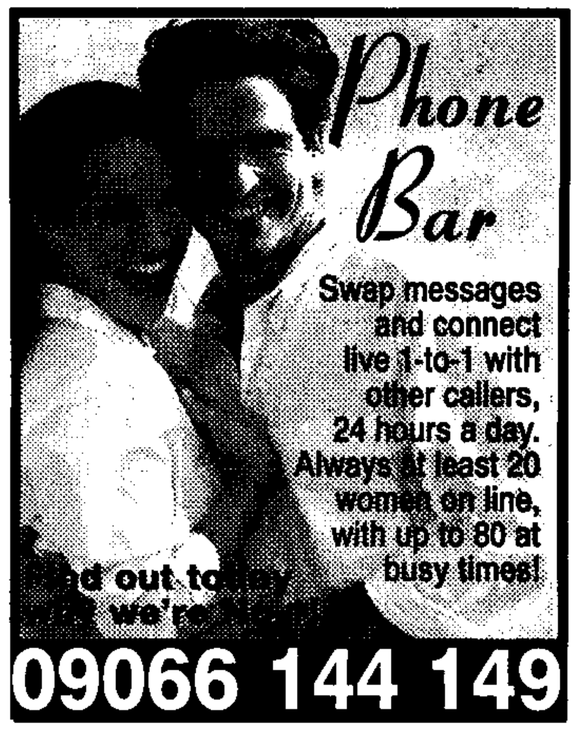
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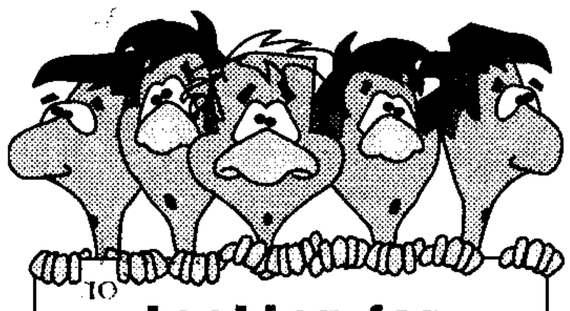

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PRISONER NEEDS £12,000 for honest release. Anything appreciated. HSBC 40-40-24, 91466488.

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AFRICAN REFUGEE – desperate help family back home. Donations gratefully accepted. Thank you. HSBC 40-47-75, 22002973.

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BABY DUE, central heating required. £2000 solves everything. Much appreciated. HSBC 40-32-18, 81071130.

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SMALL BUSINESS owner desperately needs £10,000 for survival after run of back luck. Ten employees jobs at stake. Nat West 01-04-84, 80276644.

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SPINA BIFIDA VICTIM. Please help. Money won't cure me but will give me some quality of life. HSBC 40-45-28, 31096370.

MANY SCHEMES, have failed and I'm back to square one. In the maze of life will you be my compass? Lloyds 30-97-17, 1341689. Box 2498.

INVENTOR SEEKS donations for invention development and patenting. Lloyds 30-94-55, 7251948.

RETIRED COUPLE, solvent but no windfalls / inheritances, seeks altruistic gift (£25,000) to fulfil dream of home in France before time runs out. HSBC 40-33-10, 00814849.

STUDENT NURSE living on bursary, seeks money to hope with food, rent and the occasional beer. Box 2898.

MILLIONAIRE GUARDIAN angel needed to clear debts. Are you him/her? I am desperate. Box 3098.

£1300 NEEDED to complete studies. Banks won't help NatWest 60-24-02 98931997. Thanks

HELP! Proud but broke. Any aid welcome. Natwest 60-18-11, 69038058.

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